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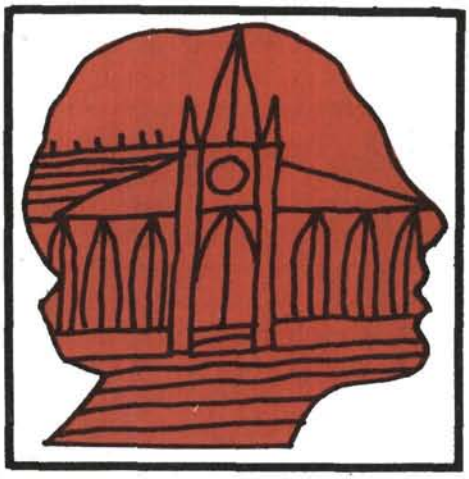
The Editors
BARGAINING CHIPS

Jeremiah Baruch
HOW THE BANKS WON

$1.25

JUNE 17, 1983

The case of Sister Mansour



What the case was really about & why it matters

MADONNA KOLBENSCHLAG

Time for a second opinion

An alternative to Dr. Reagan's approach to health care
THOMAS HIGGINS

GERALD WEALES on ' 'Night Mother' PETER CLECAK on Walker Percy COLIN L. WESTERBECK, JR., on 'Breathless'

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Correspondence

'DEMOCRATIC CAPITALISM'

MICHAEL NOVAK, ROBERT BENNE, & OTHERS

A simple shortage of space in our pages has prevented us from publishing more promptly the extended replies to Peter Steinfels's articles early this year on "democratic capitalism." A selection of these letters is printed here, with apologies to the authors for the delay.

THE EDITORS

Delaware, Ohio

To the Editors: Allow me a few lines to respond to Peter Steinfels's extended commentary [Jan. 14-Feb. 11] on Michael Novak's *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*. . . .

It is a great mistake, as Maritain pointed out years ago, to call the American economic system capitalism. "Capitalism" was in its origins and remains mostly a polemical term and to accept it, as Maritain wrote, "is to accept the challenge of Communism in the very terms of Communist propaganda itself." By the same token, Steinfels is not likely in any serious sense a socialist, democratic or otherwise. But these terms are given with the territory and define the parameters of a great deal of our political dialogue. All the more reason, then, to be aware of their inadequacy.

I am not going to comment on Steinfels's first article. The primary purpose of that effort seems to have been to get the venom out and do some ritualistic dumping on Novak. The second article made a good point or two and was enhanced by a comparison with Benne and some confessional humility towards the end. I think it is true that Novak projects the term "democratic capitalism" too loosely over a long span of time and thus makes himself vulnerable to some of the criticisms of the sort Steinfels raises. But to move from this legitimate perception to the quite idiosyncratic notion that Novak is "an eighteenth-century British Tory" strains the reader's credibility. Moreover, by reading Novak too narrowly through historical lenses, Steinfels misses what is most original and substantial in his book.

Specifically, Steinfels fails to acknowledge adequately or discuss intelligently two major claims Novak makes for his book. One is that democratic capitalism grew out of a moral-cultural base; it is a moral system and a humanism. The shapers of capitalism were not primarily economists but moral philosophers like Smith, Montesquieu, Hume, and later the utilitarians. When we read them it is clear that they were consciously introducing a new and what they thought was a superior moral order — superior both in the way of promoting individual virtue and guaranteeing more stable political arrangements. Steinfels virtually ignores the explicit moral and philosophical basis upon which democratic capitalism rests.

That is one point. What truly astounds me is that Steinfels also ignores the theological aspect of Novak's book. We are told as early as page 14 that the book is about "the theological presuppositions, values, and systemic intentions" of democratic capitalism. Not to see *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* as a creative work of theology, and discuss it as such, is quite simply to miss the point. Steinfels misses it by a mile.

Novak's book resonates at three quite distinct levels: the historical, the philosophical, and the theological. Steinfels read it quite well on the historical level, but he manifests a very imperfect understanding of *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* as philosophy and as theology.

Once again Novak has confounded his critics with trinitarian imagery!

BERNARD MURCHLAND

Political incompetence

Stanford, Calif.

To the Editors: Resort to name-calling usually signifies an intellectually weak position, and Peter Steinfels's review of *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* proves no exception to the general rule.

Characterizations of Novak as "ideologically promiscuous" and "an eighteenth-century British Tory," and of his position as "reminiscent of [Louis Hartz's] New Whiggery" and "Reaganism with a theological face" substitute for the discussion and rebuttal of Novak's arguments which Steinfels is apparently unable to deliver . . .

Despite numerous definitional and factual quibbles, Steinfels seems to agree with Novak as to the desirability of a society's being politically democratic and culturally pluralistic. Where he apparently disagrees is with Novak's contention that the economic component of such a society must be primarily capitalistic, rather than socialistic. One would expect, therefore, that Steinfels would confront and seek to rebut Novak's arguments that, both theoretically and in practice, societies lacking a strong capitalistic element are unlikely to remain for long, simultaneously free, diverse, and economically productive. Not only does he fail to do this, Steinfels also fails to explain why he is admittedly "attracted" to democratic socialism, or, even, how socialism, as prefaced by the word "democratic," differs as an economic system from socialism as usually defined.

If socialism means anything, it means that economic decisions are made politi-

(Continued on page 376)

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MX & OTHER CHIPS OFF THE BARGAINING BLOCK

RIDDLE: When is a missile not a missile? Answer: When it is a bargaining chip. In voting $625 million for development of the MX missile, the decisive faction in Congress voted not for a missile but for a bargaining chip. The bargain, oddly enough, is not with the Soviets, at least not at first. It is with Mr. Reagan. Congress has offered the president one more step toward building these ten-warheaded monsters in exchange for the president's getting serious about arms control. If the president doesn't keep his end of the bargain, presumably Congress will take his missiles away at a later stage of funding. If the president does get serious about arms control, then presumably he needs the MX to make the Soviets serious about arms control. And, then, when *everybody* gets serious about arms control, presumably we can drop the MX altogether. Happy ending, and please don't mention the tooth fairy.

Just to top the oddity off, the MX without an invulnerable basing mode is a weapon that increases the danger of the Soviet first strike it was originally intended to counteract. It is precisely the kind of missile the Scowcroft commission said we should eliminate — although the commission then turned around and recommended it, like a doctor advising an overweight patient to enjoy one final binge before going on a diet. The *New York Times* called this "voodoo arms control," which may have been unfair to voodoo.

Shift to the European scene, where the next six months will witness increasing conflict over the deployment of Pershing IIs and cruise missiles. By most serious accounts, those missiles were never required on purely military grounds. They were conceived as a way to insure NATO solidarity, a means to keep Moscow from thinking that the U.S., faced with a threat from Soviet SS-20s, might "fold" rather than up the ante and involve America's own sea- and land-based strategic missiles. A clever theory, but the immediate consequence has been to tatter NATO solidarity more than ever. Still, something must be salvaged from a bad decision. So the Euromissiles, too, have been turned into bargaining chips.

"Bargaining chips, cowchips," one impolite legislator was heard to say during the MX debate. Unfortunately, it's not so simple. The evidence indicates that the Kremlin is as shy of serious arms limitations as the White House. The latter has been pushed to the table only by a wave of anti-nuclear agitation. There is no corresponding pressure on the former. Taken separately, there are ample grounds for opposing the MX, the Euromissiles, the Trident II, the B-1, the soon-to-be-tested, antisatellite rocket. Knock them all out, and you have probably also knocked out any chance of the Soviets' entering the kind of bilateral agreement that might securely dampen and then reverse the arms race. If Washington is without bargaining chips, its arms control efforts will be futile. But if Washington is without bargainers, its bargaining chips will be dangerous excuses. The problem boils down to that.

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Washington report

YOU CAN BANK ON IT

TAX CHEATING KEPT EASY

THE GOOD NEWS in Washington this past month is that constituents appear to be much more interested in legislation before Congress.

The bad news in Washington this past month is that constituents appear to be much more interested in legislation before Congress.

In fact, it may only be computers that are concerned.

Thousands of letters, mailgrams, and postcards have been sputtering out of the computers of the nation's banks, via their customers, to Capitol Hill, where an equal number of letters have been spun out by House and Senate computers — in what has been described as the heaviest mail campaign ever to hit Congress. The banks' computers are talking to the Hill's computers about the repeal of the scheduled July 1, 1983, ten percent withholding of taxes from dividends and interest payments.

Was this conversation between HAL and his pals fruitful? Well, in a word, yes. From 150,000 to 300,000 pieces of mail deluged each Senate office, and 12,000 to 25,000 each in the House. On April 21, the Senate agreed to delay tax withholding, at least until 1987, by the slim margin of 91 to 5. (Rumors have it that the IBMs were jammed for the five that voted against the measure.) In the House, another close call, this one on May 17 by a vote of 382 to 41, came down for a straight repeal. So much for a threatened presidential veto. And so much for congressional consternation over $200 billion deficits. The measures that passed overwhelmingly in both chambers, despite being vigorously opposed by the House and Senate leadership, will add a cool $13.4 billion to the deficit through lost revenue.

For those interested in mounting such a successful lobbying effort in the future, pay attention to the maneuvers used during this one. Somehow, Americans, virtually overnight, were convinced that the withholding provision was a new tax, and who wants to be in favor of new taxes? In fact, the measure was a compliance vehicle, a provision to chip away at the estimated ten to fifteen percent of those who never manage to get around to paying taxes on interest earned.

The Senate delayed withholding until 1987; it will be implemented only if the General Accounting Office finds that tax-cheating on interest and dividends has not been cut down substantially and both Houses affirm such findings. The Senate came up with the delay compromise rather than outright repeal, to save the president from having to follow through with his promise to veto any repeal attempt and thus risk being readily overridden by a Senate controlled by his own party. As one advocate for the poor observed, if a provision to prevent fraud in food stamps was delayed for four years to see if the fraud rate had been reduced on its own, there would be an uproar of righteous indignation across the country.

But never you mind. Here comes the American Bankers Association — the major bank lobby — with its membership comprising most of the nation's fourteen thousand banks. History has shown that the banking industry had successfully beaten back earlier presidential initiatives (Kennedy in 1962, and, more recently, Carter in 1979) to collect taxes on interest and dividends upfront, just as is done with in wages. But this time withholding was packaged into a much larger and much needed revenue measure that passed Congress last year with bipartisan support, and was sent to a highly receptive President Reagan.

A number of major banks, including Bank of America and Citicorp, were willing to let withholding go into effect in July rather than lobby to overturn the law and risk the wrath of Revenue Committee Chairmen Sen. Bob Dole and Rep. Dan Rostenkowski. After all, there were much weightier issues awaiting governmental action, including bailing out international bankers for bad overseas loans; moreover, many bankers would not risk retaliation in tax laws that they have found to be quite favorable. Banks are able to lower or eliminate federal taxes through the use of tax-free bonds, investment tax credits, and depreciation (largely from leasing deals). For example, in a recent study the Joint Committee on Taxation found that Bank of America, the nation's second largest, with U.S. income of $154 million in 1981, got a refund or tax credit of $18 million — translating into a *negative* tax rate of 11.7 percent.

Nonetheless, the American Banking Association (ABA) had compelling reasons to launch an attack on the withholding provision. Trade associations periodically need to justify their existence (and dues) to their members — and a common enemy is a useful device. A lobbying principle can be seen working n the ABA, as in other associations, that is, they must skillfully seek out issues which will offend the least number of their members. This, as Bill Keller of the Dallas *Times Herald* has pointed out, leaves the common interest to be defined by the less public-spirited members, or the "lowest common denominator." This principle was operating in the National Automobile Dealer's Association fight against regulation of used car sales, and the American Medical Association's campaign to stop regulation of unfair practices by physicians. In addition, given the competition for the loyalty of smaller banks by the Independent Bankers Associations, the ABA saw an opportunity and seized it with zest.

The ABA offered members complimentary press kits equipped with posters for bank vestibules, and samples of press releases, speeches, advertisements, and sample letters from bankers and customers to congressmen and newspaper editors. Association members could also send away for any number of printed, pre-addressed postcards for depositors to send to Congress. Nearly fifteen thousand kits were requested, and it is estimated that more than half of the nation's commercial banks were involved in the campaign.

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In keeping with *Commonweal*'s usual summer schedule, only one issue will be published each month during July and August. The next issue will be dated July 15.

The banking industry's efforts had a telling effect as hundreds of thousands of customers kept those postcards and letters coming. But an apparently unintended consequence of the banker's campaign also significantly aided their cause — that was the delivery to members of Congress of great lists of potential campaign contributors. Every member of the House and Senate was provided the names of thousands of their constituents who (1) had enough money to have savings accounts, and (2) in their letters often further identified their interests — senior citizen, widow, businessman, etc.

All that was needed was for a member to reply to the concerned bank or savings-and-loan depositors that he or she had voted for repeal; and then to send a letter a little later reminding them of their representative's responsiveness and possibly identifying other legislation of potential concern to the depositors, now identified and categorized. Later on, a campaign committee can ask for a donation to keep our right-thinking rep in office. Most members did not vote for repeal or delay of the withholding provision just to acquire a valuable campaign hit list — but it certainly contributed to the overwhelming margin of victory, particularly in the House.

A practical consequence of the banks' lobbying has been to aid significantly the reelection campaigns of a number of members of Congress. This is an inadvertent continuation of direct efforts made in the form of PAC money. A total of 414 banking and savings institutions' political action committees have contributed in the past two years over $3 million to ninety percent of the members of the 98th Congress. Just the three major trade associations seeking repeal of withholding — the ABA, the U.S. League of Savings Institutions, and the Credit Union National Association — together contributed more than $1 million to congressional candidates in 1981 and 1982.

American banks successfully bought and fought their way against the withholding measure — but the nation's coffers will have $13.4 billion less in the next four years. The upcoming deficits will be that much larger. Ironically, it is this same industry that will be the loudest to bemoan increasing deficits — particularly as the deficits' demands eat up more and more of the money available for investment and keep interest rates at a break-the-bank height. Perhaps to help the deficits, the banks will again raise the specter of the welfare cheat to cut social programs — the tax cheat being too costly and cumbersome to pursue.

Congress is quite sensitive to intensity of interests. When citizens are willing to spend time and money on an issue, members take notice; if members do not, it is at their own electoral peril. We are in a system where — to the extent that money talks, both directly in campaign aid and indirectly through sophisticated advertisements and computer-targeted solicitations — certain citizens can express their intensely held convictions with greater impact than others.

Citizens have come to trust their local banks as pillars of the community and holders of their mortgages. When they are told that the government is further intruding into their lives and costing the banks money, and thereby the depositors as well, citizens tend to believe what they hear. (The ABA estimated costs of implementing the withholding measure at $300,000 to $400,000 per institution; counter-estimates by data processing firms offering systems to banks were placed at $40,000.) A large number of solicited bank customers wrote their own letters protesting withholding, even though the estimated loss of their interest was 54 cents for every $1,000 deposited. A larger number simply marked off a pre-addressed postcard, as easy as a magazine subscription — until the bill comes due.

Well, the bill won't be due on July 1; the U.S. will continue to postpone figuring out how its bills are going to be paid. Rest easy, citizens of American. Banks won't be taking your taxes out of your account; but don't thank your friendly local banker. Thank the one thing everyone is always blasting — thank the system.

JEREMIAH BARUCH

Of several minds: *Abigail McCarthy*

A THREATENED RESOURCE

LEADERSHIP & CATHOLIC WOMEN'S COLLEGES

ALMOST HALF the women in the House of Representatives, one of the two women Cabinet members and many state and local office-holders come from a small identifiable group of colleges. So do two of the three women who have been elected mayors of America's largest cities. Which group of colleges has produced these women leaders? The prestigious Seven Sisters of the ivy league? Think again. They have come from the small Catholic women's colleges.

I stumbled across this surprising fact while doing research on a paper for the Neylan Conference, the association of colleges sponsored by women religious. There are 132 Neylan colleges in the United States, of which, at last count, 55 were women's colleges. In the world of higher education these women's colleges constitute a tiny minority. And yet they have had this surprising result.

In the past few weeks, when I have called people's attention to this interesting and rather puzzling phenomenon, the tendency has been to explain it away. They must be widows who "inherited" their husband's seats. Or they must be the appointees of politicians paying off old debts. Quite the contrary. These women

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belong to the current generation of women office-holders — those who overcome the obstacles women face in the difficult world of nitty-gritty politics to reach some of the highest offices available to either men or women. They have reached pinnacles of influence in an arena which affects all of our lives. No other Catholic women are in a position where they can do so much good except, of course, the Catholic women educators who helped to form them.

What did their colleges do for these women? Recent research, especially the research done by Dr. Elizabeth Tidball, makes it clear that, until the present time at least, most women of high achievement have come from the women's colleges in general. Patricia Roberts Harris, noting this when she was Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, spoke feelingly,'' . . . what a luminous minority these institutions have been — what achievements they have piled up!'' Women from these colleges, she continued ''have a higher than average level of intellectual self-esteem, a great deal of involvement in academic and student life, a greater likelihood of completing college, enrolling in graduate and professional schools and attaining doctoral degrees.''

What is true of all women's colleges is true of the Catholic women's colleges. The congresswomen I talked to mentioned the same things other women's college graduates do. Throughout their college lives they saw women as role models — as professors, department heads, administrators. They themselves had the opportunity to develop and exercise leadership. ''There was no question of a man as the student body president and the woman as vice president,'' said one. ''We were the leaders and we had the responsibility. We came out of college unafraid of responsibility and willing to take it.'' They were the editors, the athletes, the fund-raisers. They learned what they could do.

Did the Catholic women's colleges do something more? Mary Rose Oakar, congresswoman from Ohio, thinks there was another dimension. ''There was the effect of the nuns themselves — a group of highly dedicated women,'' she says. ''The nuns who taught me at Ursuline were committed to the education of women. They were wonderful women, and the lay teachers who taught with them were wonderful people, too. We had almost individual attention at all times and great encouragement to do whatever we hoped to do. And the emphasis was on Christian humanism — a total development of the whole person. Concern, compassion, caring for others — we absorbed those things almost unconsciously. They were part of being a woman.''

But why politics? The congresswomen themselves can only hazard guesses. Until recently Catholics looked on themselves as a minority, and the traditional paths into the mainstream for minorities have been politics, sports, and the arts. Most of the office-holders we are talking about, however, have come into prominence during recent years when, researchers agree, Catholics had already become part of the mainstream.

It may be that the Catholic colleges educate a different economic group. A few years ago, Barbara Mikulski, congresswoman from Maryland, trying to explain the numbers of ethnic women successful in politics, had this to say, ''Our mothers were housewives or working women. The only female role models we had were the Catholic nuns. We had no knowledge of, or experience with, the clubwoman and volunteer life. We tended to follow our fathers into the grass-roots organizations.'' That applies to some of the women we are talking about but not to all of them by any means.

Jeanne Simon (wife if Representative Paul Simon of Illinois), a lawyer and former state legislator, has other explanations. ''Our colleges were small, but the attitude was that no area of study was closed to us. There was a common core of study, and we tended, all of us, to be studying and discussing the same things — Aquinas's theory of politics, for example.'' She also feels that these small colleges fostered a sense of friendship and sisterhood among the women who attended them. ''Barat in my time attracted women from rather well-to-do, conventional Catholic families. When I first ran for office, I was reluctant to ask for help from other alumnae. But they came, and they offered to do what they could, whether they were Republican or Democrat. The sense seemed to be 'you're one of ours and we believe in you'.''

Women from other colleges find this supportiveness, friendship, and sisterhood enviable. Women in the political world face fierce competition and merciless examination by the press and public. Support from other women is invaluable to them.

The best explanation of all for the number of Catholic women graduates in politics is one of those cited by Congresswoman Oakar. ''Our educations called us to service, and politics is one of the best ways of serving and helping others, of making their lives better.'' Research bears her out — women legislators over the years have tended to pay more attention to the needs of families, of children, of the poor, as well as to the cause of peace.

The colleges which produced these women and inspired them are now at risk for several reasons. All colleges are vulnerable today because of the dwindling of the college-age population and the drying up of funds. Small women's colleges are even more vulnerable than others because they have little or no endowment and are highly tuition-dependent in an era of soaring costs. In addition Catholic women's colleges suffer from a weakening of commitment to education on the part of religious in some cases, and from the competition of tuition-hungry men's colleges which have become coeducational. Five women's colleges have closed in the last few years. It would be a shame if the educational resource which has been so fruitful in giving us caring and concerned women leaders should disappear.

ABIGAIL McCARTHY

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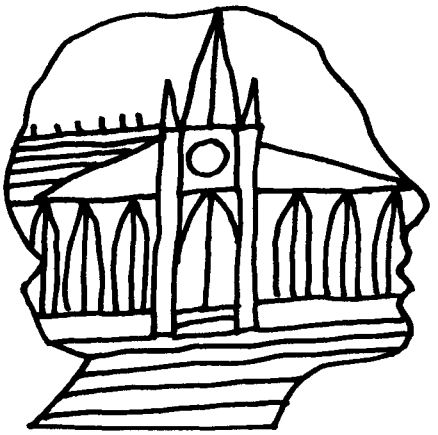

Sister Mansour is not alone

MADONNA KOLBENSCHLAG

ON MAY 9, Sister Agnes Mary Mansour, R.S.M., was faced with an ultimatum directly from the pope: resign from her post as Michigan director of social services or be dismissed from her religious order. Sister Mansour elected to request dispensation from her vows.

Sister Mansour's choice, made with "deep regret," came after months of tensions and fruitless exchanges involving her and the Sisters of Mercy, Archbishop Szoka of Detroit, right-to-life activists, and Rome. Prior to her appointment last December, Sister Mansour's superior contacted Archbishop Szoka regarding his view of the matter. At the time he indicated he saw "no problem." Subsequent to her acceptance, the archbishop gave affirmative comments to the local media concerning her appointment. In the ensuing weeks, anti-abortion groups attacked Archbishop Szoka and Sister Mansour with ad campaigns, threatened boycotts, and a mail "blitz." One ad suggested that if readers thought Szoka's decision was wrong, they should write directly to the archbishop and also to the pope. On February 23, Szoka suddenly announced his objection to Sister Mansour's appointment and called for her resignation. Various efforts to mediate the dispute or to obtain further reviews of the matter proved fruitless. Some of this conflict was played out in the media, but much of it remained confidential. And this combination of the sensational and the secret, as well as the complexity of some of the issues involved, has left many people with little understanding of what is truly at stake in the controversy concerning Sister Mansour.

To some people, especially women in the church — and even more especially women religious — the case was only one more instance of high-handedness by an exclusively male, authoritarian church bureaucracy.

To others, the case was a healthy reassertion of clarity in the face of increasing confusion about the roles of laity, sisters, and priests in the church; or yet again a healthy reassertion of church authority in the face of willingness to depart from official positions in regard to abortion, birth control, and other moral issues.

To still others, the case was strictly an individual affair, only one more in a familiar model of post-Vatican skirmishes. Regardless of how justice might be distributed among the contending parties, it was an episode that could safely be ignored, in favor of more important religious and political questions.

Each of these reactions may stem from some valid concern; but each, though not necessarily to the same degree, is an inadequate interpretation of Sister Mansour's case, based on misunderstandings of both the facts and the ramifications of the actions of church officials. I would argue that what has happened to Sister Mansour is, first, a matter of concern for all who believe that the church cannot preach respect for human dignity without exemplifying it in its own internal procedures. Second, Sister Mansour's forced severance from her community has serious implications for all religious women and men now serving in government posts at any level from community planning boards to state legislatures. Third, the outcome of this controversy may drastically alter the future shape of women's religious orders. Fourth, the events in Detroit and Rome place in considerable jeopardy the autonomy traditionally accorded well-ordered religious congregations and the legitimate authority of their superiors. Sister Mansour's case constitutes a flagrant violation of both due process and the spirit of collegiality and subsidiarity that are the essence of ecclesial communion.

I realize that these assertions may appear exaggerated and irrelevant to those who view Sister Mansour's case as a simple question of whether she was publicly at variance with the church's moral teaching on abortion. Their view, however, is

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based on an inaccurate understanding of both Sister Mansour's position and the church's moral teaching.Sister Mansour has been unwavering in her stance on abortion. She has clearly declared her personal opposition to abortion. She has also said that as long as abortion does remain legal she refuses to approve cutting off payments for abortions provided to poor women who qualify under Medicaid. These funds are provided through the Michigan Department of Social Services, which Sister Mansour was appointed to head, but her views on these issues were well known long before her appointment. Her position on Medicaid funding for abortions is in fact held by a number of outspoken abortion opponents as well as by many Catholic politicians and civil servants. It is also considered a permissible opinion by noted moral theologians.

Abortion is an issue that understandably — indeed, properly — evokes strong feelings. So does the possibility of nuclear war. Yet both are complex issues, and Catholics cannot be expected to agree on all specific policy choices that may be posed in these areas. The recent peace pastoral of the bishops makes this eminently clear. There is a determined effort to tolerate conflicting views on certain very specific policy choices. This is one point where Rome and the American bishops seem to be in the strongest agreement. The Vatican memorandum summarizing the meeting last January between representatives of the American and European bishops as well as papal officials clearly counsels a graduated scale of authority and competence in pastoral teaching. The American drafters of the pastoral are advised that episcopal authority diminishes as the subject of their pronouncements moves from doctrine to practical moral choices. "Bishops must not take sides, as *magistri fidei,* when various moral choices are possible. This has to be taken into account when general moral principles are applied to concrete situations, facts, government policies, or strategies." Thus the authority of the bishops speaking to the faithful on racism would be one thing; their authority on the desirability of busing might be considerably less.

It is difficult to see why this reasonable standard of tolerance and restraint should apply to nuclear warfare but not to abortion, sterilization, contraception, and other issues related to sexual morality. A double standard seems to prevail. In the whole area of human reproduction, the church becomes compulsively specific and concrete. Yet some theologians recognize that within the spectrum of issues related to abortion even the question of when life-as-person begins is still within the range of respectable debate. Surely specific policy questions, such as Medicaid funding for abortions, is at the end of the spectrum where disagreements among reasonable and faithful Catholics have to be respected.

In fact, such disagreements about abortion policy have often gone without provoking the kind of sanction visited on Sister Mansour. As it happens, her predecessor in the Michigan post was a Catholic layman; he was not harassed by his bishop regarding his policy views. Nor was Joe Califano when he was appointed Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. Nor have been Governor Mario Cuomo of New York or a host of other Catholic officials in states which continue Medicaid payments for abortion. True, they have encountered criticism from Catholics who reach different policy conclusions from their moral principles, just as Catholic officials connected with the Reagan administration's arms policies have been subject to criticism for being, in the eyes of some, out of step with the church's teaching. But none of these officials has been formally rebuked or forced to sever their ties with their Catholic communities.

Mirror image? In Minnesota, Sister Mary Madonna Ashton, C.S.J., a former hospital administrator, was recently confirmed as state commissioner of health, a position requiring distribution of funds for family planning, another morally sensitive area for the church. Archbishop John R. Roach of St. Paul and Minneapolis, nonetheless gave his blessing to her appointment. So did Minnesota's powerful pro-life lobby, while women's rights groups voiced opposition.

Is the crux of this case, then, not a particular position on funding abortions for poor women, but the fact that this position is taken publicly by a woman religious rather than a layperson?

SUCH WAS, in fact, the burden of the message delivered to Sister Mansour by the papal representative. It was the "ecclesial identity" of her status as a religious sister that required strict adherence to magisterial teaching. This criterion presumed, of course, what does not seem to be the fact — that opposition to Medicaid abortion funding is "magisterial teaching." If so, it should be binding on all Catholics, lay and religious alike. But the pope's delegate later went on to admit that Sister Mansour could well have disagreed with this "magisterial" position had she not been a religious.

The papal position unquestionably coincides with a popular view of members of religious orders. Both Catholics and non-Catholics have often tended to identify life in a religious congregation with the clerical state, a confusion made all the easier by the fact that many male religious are indeed also clerics.

But the fact remains that this is a misunderstanding. Women religious are not some species of semi-priests. The Second Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* clearly identifies non-clerical religious with the lay state: "The religious state of life is not an intermediate state between the clerical and lay states. But rather, the faithful of Christ are called by God from both these states of life so that they might enjoy this particular gift in the life of the church . . . and advance the salvific mission of the church."

One major trend since the Council has been the declericalization of religious life, and the assumption by women religious of tasks promoting human development in the world outside formally "church" institutions. For a long time, women religious had been isolated in a quasi-clerical state. But particularly in North America and Latin America that clearly

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bounded, hierarchical structure has been giving way to one more aptly described in terms of semi-permeable membranes, permitting religious far more collaboration and solidarity with all the people of God in their social, economic, and political tasks. This change has been widely recognized as a key factor in the renewal of the church.

But there is unquestionably a counter-current at work as well, especially in the Vatican, which views the blurring of roles among the faithful with apprehension and therefore seeks to define these roles ever more sharply. I will return to that second development later.

Whatever the questions that may be posed by the participation of ordained ministers in political posts, it must be recognized that the status of non-clerical religious (who, for the most part, are women) is different. They have joined together in their vows to pursue a variety of forms of religious life. The special character and focus of their activities arise not from any clerical role but from the different historical visions of their separate religious congregations and their discernment of what is needed to serve those visions in today's world.

The real question posed in the case of Sister Mansour is not whether holding a government position, and exercising the necessary independent judgment on specific policy choices that goes with it, is properly "lay" or "clerical." It is whether this kind of responsibility is in keeping with the mission of the church and faithfulness to the traditions and goals of particular religious congregations.

A QUESTION like that cannot be resolved in the abstract. The involvement of religious and clergy in the political sphere has fluctuated in history. The early Christians avoided public offices because they were associated with pagan worship, and the lower social standing of many Christians in Roman society made them unlikely candidates for such offices in any case. But in the declining years of the Roman Empire and the early Middle Ages, clergy were pressed into such service because of their education and administrative skills. In a time of threatened universal anarchy, church personnel helped keep the ship of state afloat.

In our own time, thousands of women and men in religious life have joined in efforts "to establish the kingdom of God within the very structures of the world," as the key document on "Religious Life and Human Promotion," published in 1980 by the Vatican Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, put it. In the same document and in other pastoral teachings, religious have been urged to give voice, conscience, and commitment to the poor, to refugees, to the elderly and marginalized, to those denied human rights or social assistance, to working men and women; they have been urged to a new co-responsibility with the laity. In carrying out these responsibilities they have found themselves inevitably involved in situations demanding action for change. And they have found that in a modern context, with its pluralism, with its interaction between public and private sectors, their social ministries are rapidly translated into political challenges. Too many problems are beyond the capacity of private voluntary organizations or efforts; some action for change can be undertaken only from "within the system."

The "stories" of most women religious who now hold legislative offices or are serving in other government capacities will bear out this pattern. Several have described their previous apostolates as history teachers or grade-school principals or community organizers or advocates for the poor. They speak of their recognition of the ways in which politics impinges on everything, and their eventual decision to seek political responsibility in order to "define" politics rather than simply be victimized by it — or, more importantly, stand helplessly by while others are victimized. As Sister Arlene Violet, R.S.M., an attorney and former candidate for political office, expressed it when speaking of the deals made in legislative bodies and committees, "We cannot surrender to the power brokers."

Other sisters describe their entry into politics as an effort to empower others, to be "carriers of the Gospel agenda." Their ministry is often seen as a double one: to their constituencies and to their legislative or governmental peers. When Sister Clare Dunn, C.S.J., minority leader in the Arizona state legislature, was killed in 1981, she was eulogized by her peers as "the conscience of the House and a champion of the poor." Her distinguished career had a significant impact on Arizona politics and public policy.

Now in her third term, Sister Ardeth Platte, O.P., has been a city councilwoman in Saginaw, Michigan, for ten years. She maintains that the experience of religious women gives them a unique value orientation incorporating a concern for human dignity, participatory structures for governing, and respect for the sacredness of the earth. Sister Platte is persuaded that religious women have a "mandate" for involvement in the politics of our time and culture.

These women — and similar cases of men might be cited as well — come to politics out of the historic association of the church with education, health care, and social services. (As irony would have it, the first superintendent of the poor in Michigan, appointed shortly after Michigan became a state, was a Roman Catholic priest! Sister Mansour noted this in her confirmation hearings.) These religious are where they are today as a result of a gradual process of prayerful discernment and dialogue within their communities, and out of a commitment to the disadvantaged. Not surprisingly, but very significantly, most of this new breed of women religious in politics are active at the state and local level, where their efforts can often have greater impact than at the national level and also where their political work seems to spring most naturally from direct, personal contact with the human needs of their constituencies.

These women are a revelation in process. Their stories must be incorporated, as an authentic part of the "*sensus fidelium*," into the church's own discernment process. The momentum leading religious women and men from work with and for the poor to affecting social structures through government positions was significant enough to be clearly outlined in a memorandum forwarded in 1978 to the Vatican Congregation

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for Religious by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men. The memorandum concluded, "The notion of religious assuming certain lay roles in 'supplementary' capacity is less valuable than at first may appear. The simple fact is that all the political activities we ascribe to religious appear to be not supplementary, but normal."

ARE THERE moral ambiguities to be faced in this new political activity? Dilemmas of conscience? Yes, obviously. But usually no greater than the kind one might find in a university system, a hospital, or even in a chancery. Political ambiguities often focus on making a choice between what one's conscience dictates, what the party agenda might demand, or what is needed to get reelected. Vatican caution about the participation of religious in "party politics" often seems to reflect a context foreign to the American scene. (The Vatican may also be relatively unattuned to the less monastic, more activist origins of many American women's orders as compared to European ones.) One important Vatican document, for example, warns against contamination by "ideologies which promote class struggle."

American women religious in politics recognize that these warnings may be appropriate in certain cultural situations. But Sister Elizabeth Morancy, R.S.M., a Rhode Island state representative who has often been lauded by civic groups as well as her bishop for her dedication to the disadvantaged, observes that American political parties are frequently so "non-doctrinaire" that their agendas are interchangeable — and usually are the product of as broad a consensus as possible.

Sister Morancy admits that on occasion the "shenanigans" of party machinery present embarrassments. The real dilemma, as she sees it, is in deciding at any given moment whether it is more effective to be on the inside or on the outside of the system in order to promote a just social order. Religious women and men who have served in public office recognize that responsibility for administering an unjust law or immoral public policy could be an insurmountable obstacle that might require their resignation from office. They also recognize that conflicts could arise between perfectly valid roles. Just as journalists usually take a leave of absence from their activities if they become directly involved in politics — or refrain from public political engagements while working as reporters, some religious women and several canonists believe such leaves would be appropriate for women religious who serve in highly visible government offices. (Sister Mansour requested and was granted such a leave by her religious order in April; it was denied by the Vatican.) Some women religious have also told me that they believe certain roles would be inappropriate for religious under most circumstances, for example, serving as a criminal prosecutor.

The key is discernment of the specific situation or role. Obviously the local ordinary has some authority in this process. But in the case of religious this discernment should not be thought of as somehow radically different from that undertaken by laypeople — for example, when they must balance opportunities to exercise their gifts in service to their neighbors against certain moral risks, or when they reconcile professional responsibilities with family responsibilities, or when a particular role may be interpreted as a scandalous affront to moral standards. One supposes that individual conscience and dialogue between spouses and with children work these things out. Likewise, the woman religious must turn to her community and decide whether a political role is an authentic expression in this day, of that community's mission, within the larger context of the church's mission.

IT IS QUITE true that this is not the popular view of religious life. For many people, women religious are not seen as laypeople who have consecrated themselves to a special kind of life and joined together in differently gifted congregations to lead it. They are seen, instead, as delegates or representatives of the church at large — again, as quasi-clerics. This view of things presents problems and it cannot, therefore, be ignored. But it should be challenged and corrected as the experience of women religious in new roles is recognized and assimilated.

That recognition and assimilation is certainly incomplete, at least by Rome. The key document illustrating this is the 1980 one already mentioned, "Religious Life and Human Promotion." It reflects the post-Vatican Council change in the church when it views engagement with politics and the world of work as integral to evangelization. "The need for greater solidarity with their contemporaries, especially the poor and underprivileged, compelled religious men and women to become more actively involved, sometimes even in the working world and in politics."

Yet the caution signaled in that wording ("sometimes even") is underlined a few paragraphs later when religious, having been urged to "live a life totally available to God, to the church, and to others," are then told, "Religious by their choice of life limit their participation in secular structures" and, for them, political ministry should be allowed only as an "exception."

This ambivalence may be understandable in a period of transition and experiment. But, in fact, while the experience of women religious and many other faithful seems to be moving in the direction of new and overlapping roles, Pope John Paul II has been particularly emphatic in stressing the sharp division of roles in the church. Clear evidence of this countertrend can be seen in the sharp differentiation in the Revised Code of Canon Law between religious and secular institutes. There was reportedly an effort by the revision committee to eliminate this distinction, since all non-clerical religious have lay status; but the distinction was subsequently reasserted and reemphasized by the Vatican. The papal mind seems to view religious in the manner of an "elite corps," set apart from the laity and absolutely loyal to the hierarchy, and whose witnessing to the Gospel is chiefly confined to the vowed life. Implicit here is a conception of the church as a clearly boundaried "*tertium quid*," an intermediate thing apart. John Paul's view has much in it of the "church-militant," counter-Reformation spirit, an ethos that sits more easily with the "fathers-and-children"

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model of church than with the "community-of-disciples" model.

It may be too much to hope, consequently, that Sister Agnes Mary Mansour's case might be a unique instance, to be attributed to a lack of episcopal prudence. Quite the contrary: she may simply be the first of many. That conclusion can be drawn if one looks at the Revised Code of Canon Law. Sister Mansour was bound under the 1917 code, which allows clerics and religious to hold public (elected) offices with the permission of their ordinaries. The proposed revisions of these sections, originally submitted in 1980, seemed to broaden the application of the old restriction to all those holding appointed as well as elected offices, with permission still to be obtained, in most cases, from the ordinary. When the Revised Code was promulgated last January — it will become effective this November — an entirely new paragraph had been substituted for that proposed revision. The new paragraph explicitly forbids clerics (and by extension, specified later in the code, religious) to hold "civil power." Period. No provision for permission or exception is indicated. Some commentators are of the opinion that the new paragraph is the direct result of papal editing.

No one really knows how many American clergy and religious may run afoul of this part of the new code. All over the country clerics and religious are serving in local offices — school boards, planning agencies, hospital and welfare commissions, city councils. A review in a recent *Commonweal* mentioned "a country pastor in Kentucky who happens also to be chairman of the local transit authority, chairman of the zoning board, chairman of the Regional Capital Improvement Program, and vice-president of the Clay County Development Association." In a number of our cities, bishops have served in appointed posts. Father Theodore Hesburgh has distinguished himself in such tasks. Would all these examples have fallen under the ban on "civil power?"

If the American bishops and the major superiors of American religious communities cannot prevail on the pope to grant an exemption in the American case, along lines recognized by the 1917 code, then a great number of extremely worthy men and women are going to undergo a terrible conflict of responsibilities. Certainly American religious communities of women will face a steady drain of some of their best, most dedicated members. "Politics" may be added to "celibacy" as a frequent motive for seeking dispensation.

There is even the potential in all this for serious alterations in the forms of religious life. Devoted women religious are likely to devise new patterns of affiliation and organization that will allow political vocations and circumvent bureaucratic rigidity. One doubts whether a new panoply of alternative structures in religious life is exactly what the Vatican has meant to encourage, but that may be the end result of its blanket strictures.

Sister Agnes M. Mansour: "From the beginning . . . I have acted in good faith seeking the necessary approvals. . . . I have attempted to be faithful to my vow of obedience by discerning honestly with my religious community and others. . . . I believe in a tradition of obedience more fully developed . . . since Vatican II . . . an obedience born out of mutual dialogue and openness to seek the truth. . . . The directive I received . . . was not the result of a dialogic, objective process, but of a unilateral one where neither I nor my religious superiors were ever given the opportunity to appropriately present our case" (Press statement, May 11, 1983).

UP TO THIS point, what I have said is marked by a degree of complexity. It involves, in relation to abortion, the distinction between general moral teachings and a specific policy choice about Medicaid funding. It involves a distinction between clerics and women religious that is confused in many minds. It involves an interpretation of changes and counter-changes that have occurred since Vatican II, and an argument for the validity of the witness of a growing number of religious women who have found themselves engaged in politics.

But there is one aspect of Sister Mansour's case that is not complex at all. It is distressingly simple. I refer to the flagrant violation of due process.

It should be utterly clear that this conflict was not one Sister Mansour sought. Her community approached Archbishop Szoka regarding her appointment, and his favorable attitude was well recorded in the media. As one report had it, the archbishop expressed his approval "as long as she makes clear her opposition to abortion. Sister Mansour is a Catholic," he said. "She follows the teachings of the church, but she cannot control the laws of the state . . . Medicaid funding is a matter of law." Indeed, the archbishop himself apparently stated much the same rationale for a woman religious's service in a government post that I have outlined here. He noted that the social services department "encompasses many of the areas religious women have traditionally worked in." Further, "Sister Mansour as director could give a powerful witness to the Christian dimension of the department of social services."

So Sister Mansour's rights were already infringed by the archbishop's sudden reversal of his position. That he apparently revoked his approval under pressure — an orchestrated campaign by anti-abortion groups, which included accusatory ads directed against him in the *Wall Street Journal* and Detroit newspapers — only emphasizes the importance of scrupulous due process. Two things in particular are needed to protect churchmen from being left hostage to such publicity campaigns: internal procedures which insure individuals fair treatment, and an external posture of respect for complex issues and tolerance for reasonable dissent.

Sister Mansour, however, never had an opportunity to present her case formally or enter into any direct dialogue with the archbishop or other church authorities. Her community's provincial administration dealt with the archdiocese while carefully avoiding the media. In fact, however, the authority of the community was simply by-passed. Rome never requested any report from the Sisters of Mercy, although, eventually, one was sent unrequested to the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (SCRIS). Instead, SCRIS simply acted

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on the basis of what it claimed was a thorough study of the facts, i.e., a report from the archbishop.

One month after the archbishop's February 23 news conference, reversing his position, Sister Theresa Kane, the major superior of the Mercy Union, received a letter from the apostolic delegate, Archbishop Pio Laghi, in which SCRIS instructed her to "require" Sister Mansour to resign her public office. After reviewing the entire matter, the Sisters of Mercy asked for a formal reconsideration of the decision from SCRIS, documenting their request with six substantive points. Rome ignored this request and, instead, acted to discipline Sister Mansour without informing her major superiors.

Thus, Sister Mansour came to her meeting with the papal representative without being informed of the nature of the options to be given her, or indeed that *any* options would be the subject of the interview. She was not informed of her right to have someone providing canonical advice present, or of her right to appeal. The letter setting up the meeting mentioned only that she might bring two companions; it said nothing of superiors, as befitted the directive to be given her. And Sister Mansour was given one hour to decide on how best to honor a commitment to which she had given thirty years of her life. *One hour.*

If Sister Mansour was treated shamefully, so was her religious community. In the past, congregations have enjoyed a relative degree of autonomy in living out the charism of their institute according to universal norms. In this case, as I noted, the community's authority was by-passed and no effort was made to obtain its view of the issue. Right to the moment of the papal delegate's visit, the Sisters of Mercy were under the impression that the conflict was still open to reconsideration. In April when Sister Mansour attempted to ameliorate the situation by requesting a leave of absence and her order cooperated by granting it, the apostolic delegate asked that this step not be revealed publicly at that time. The community agreed, expecting that this would facilitate discussion. In fact, Rome was not interested in discussion but intended to decide the matter, as it did, unilaterally.

"The prime demand of justice is to respect people, but above and beyond justice, [the ecclesiastical judge] must tend toward equity and, beyond that, to charity." So spoke Pope John Paul II last January at the time of the promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law, which contains a fundamental charter of rights pertaining to the faithful (Canons 208-23). Unfortunately, the high-flown language of "rights" in the first book of the Revised Code is not embodied in the procedures subsequently instituted. Nor does the Mansour case indicate that either the Code or the Vatican referral that is normal church routine will insure justice and equity, much less charity. In view of reports that procedures for "due process" were included in the proposed revision of the new code but had been removed when the final version left the pope's desk, all Catholics should be concerned about the potential arbitrary or questionable decisions by church authorities.

Unprecedented appeal? On May 18, the Sisters of Mercy initiated a canonical appeal of the decision of SCRIS, based on a long-standing provision in canon law known as "right of recourse." Some canonists believe the appeal may be unprecedented, since most cases have involved an individual appealing to SCRIS *against* the religious community. In the Mansour case, the religious community is appealing a decision of SCRIS against an individual member.

THERE ARE other facets of the Mansour case that are disturbing. Some public officials have expressed dismay privately that the direct action of the Vatican on a democratically appointed official could resurrect all the phobias of Roman "control" more or less laid to rest with the election of John F. Kennedy. Those worries may or may not be well-founded; in any case, it is not a question for the Constitution's First Amendment that is raised here so much as a question about how the church can effectively fulfill its mission in a pluralistic society, where the public's opportunity to choose freely among exceptionally qualified and willing citizens to fill public offices ought to be strengthened and not restricted or compromised.

But it is the disparagement of both the rights and experience of American women religious that is most painful and may have the most far-reaching consequences. These women feel themselves caught in a double bind and treated according to a double standard. Having come to a new awareness of their solidarity with the poor and the powerless, they have tried to be faithful to the mandate of the church as manifested in the theology of evangelization. But no sooner have they reshaped their lives and taken on new tasks than they are undercut and rebuked. This is a classic instance of the "double bind," the fundamental dynamic of a schizophrenic system.

Likewise, they are confronted with a double standard. In matters of discipline, they are treated as clerics. In questions of power, sacramental and ecclesiastical, they are treated as laity.

Sister Mansour is not alone. If she can become a victim of arbitrary and unfounded church discipline, so can many others. If her case gives us a glimpse of church life under the Revised Code of Canon Law and under the ecclesial vision of John Paul II, then much of the spirit of Vatican II may be at risk. Sister Mansour's case holds grave implications for the survival and identity of religious communities of women, but also for the status of the laity. Many Catholics who recognize how their own situations are touched by the case are determined not to let the matter pass.

Much will depend on the response of the American bishops — and on a wider understanding of the case itself — if the outcome is to be hopeful rather than destructive. Moreover, if the bishops' recent pronouncements on human rights, peace, and non-violence in the societal and global context are to have any validity, it will depend on how well the bishops apply these same standards to those intimate relations which often present a greater challenge — within the very household of the faith. Justice, like charity, begins at home.

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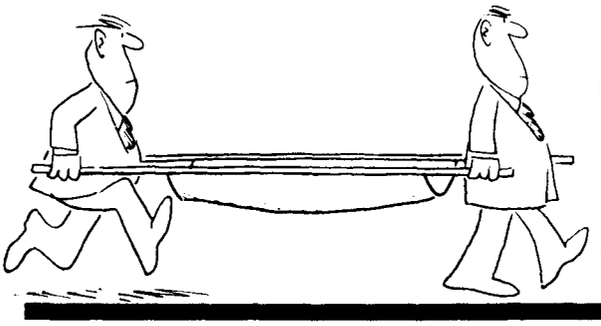
AN ALTERNATIVE TO DR. REAGAN'S HEALTH POLICY



Time for a second opinion

THOMAS HIGGINS

NOWHERE IN America is the Reagan administration's policy of indifference toward the health care needs of the poor more sadly evident than in the Northwest, where I direct a department of human services. Amid a crippled economy, thousands of people who are indigent, but ineligible for welfare, receive little or no medical assistance. As a series of articles in *The Oregonian* documented last year, the tragic consequences are sickness and death that should have been avoided. The reality mocks the president's assertion that no one is being hurt by his policies.

Even as health costs escalate, skyrocketing past other goods and services, several hospitals serving the poor here are on the edge of bankruptcy from delivering unfunded care. Actually, the number of health providers is at a historic high, but fewer than ever are willing to accept the poor as patients.

The states offer no relief. Faced with staggering deficits, they have elected to make deep cuts of their own in programs for the needy, compounding the effect of the Reagan cuts. Only the willfully ignorant still believe that the private, voluntary sector will rush in to fill the gap.

The earliest rhetoric from the Reagan administration contained at least some interesting notions on controlling health costs. Well-designed attempts by the Carter administration to do so by using selective price controls were defeated in the Congress through the fierce lobbying of the health-care industry. A much ballyhooed "voluntary effort" ensued, but once the heat was off it died quickly and with no lasting effect.

Competition, not regulation, was promised by the Reagan administration as an alternative means of reforming the system. There is much to praise in this approach; but during the first two years of the president's term, no such legislation was submitted. Health-care competition was better as campaign politics than public policy, for clearly *real* competition means losers as well as winners among groups that have been Reagan allies. Finally, the administration sent its ideas on health cost containment to Congress. They consist chiefly of raising the patient's deductible for Medicare, reducing the overall federal expenditure for Medicaid by cutting some eligibility and benefits, and limiting the amount of health benefits employees can receive without paying taxes on them. Some Medicare recipients would receive "catastrophic" coverage, and some would participate in a voluntary voucher program.

The reaction in Congress has been, to be kind, unenthusiastic. A general sense that the poor have suffered enough from cuts in Medicare and Medicaid, together with an almost solid phalanx of opposition from business, labor, and the health care industry to the tax proposal, makes the outlook for most of Mr. Reagan's policies grim. Congress has approved a proposal by the Department of Health and Human Services to switch Medicare reimbursement for hospitals to fixed payments based upon diagnosis although, as I will discuss later, this proposal is flawed and invites evasion.

What is most important, however, is that at a time when seventeen million people have lost their medical coverage because of the current recession, no support from this administration can be found for extending protection to those unable to provide for themselves. To date, the administration vows to veto proposals by Rep. Henry A. Waxman and Sen. Robert Dole to provide medical coverage to those recently unemployed.

SO WHAT about those not in the Reagan camp — the Democrats and the liberals generally? For good or ill, their tradition has been to improve access to health care by increasing its availability. To that end, in the decades since the New Deal, they passed legislation that built thousands of hospitals and trained tens of thousands of doctors, nurses, and other practitioners and researchers. They created the Veterans Administration health system, Medicare and Medicaid, and a variety of public and preventive health programs.

By most standards, these measures have been remarkably successful. More of the poor and elderly receive needed health care now than was the case before their enactment. And the American Medical Association, which vigorously contested the passage of Medicare and Medicaid, now opposes a reduction in their benefits.

But these measures also left the nation with a big and growing bill. Unless prompt action is taken, the Medicare Trust Fund, which provides hospital and physician coverage for elderly people, will be broke by 1985. And despite the fact that we are spending more as a society on health than any other country in the world, we clearly are not getting our money's worth. Too many people aren't covered; there is too much

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waste and duplication; and we are falling behind other industrial nations in comparative health.

For a while, liberals embraced planning. With federal and state legislation, local health planning bodies worked toward a rational allocation of health-care resources. The miracle is that these efforts have succeeded as well as they have, given the fragile structure they operated within. In most communities, a coalition of health providers, better organized and more sophisticated than consumers, became the dominant force in planning decisions. Naturally, planning was a political process and, just as naturally, the pros usually won.

For many liberals and Democrats, this political frustration only fueled the quest for a national health insurance program, complete with all the necessary regulation to contain costs and assure quality and accessibility of services. For them national health insurance has been the Holy Grail of domestic policy. As Senator Kennedy has demonstrated, few other issues stir their souls so completely. President Carter's temporizing on the issue cost him dearly among the faithful.

But it is not enough. Yes, liberals and Democrats should continue to champion legislation for national health insurance. Nevertheless, having chased that will-o-the-wisp for years, and now faced with a deepening crisis for millions of medically poor people, clearly these advocates of change must examine incremental reforms which hold promise of success.

The argument has been made that such incremental reforms remove the incentive for national health insurance. "When things get bad enough," whatever that means, theoretically the public will demand and get sweeping reform. That argument ignores reality. America's health care industry is unique; so are our politics. It is a hollow bluff to assert that the system can be completely converted through direct political challenge.

WHAT *IS* possible is for the government to use its resources as leverage to make significant change in financing the delivery of health care. Certainly, it is not the reimbursement system alone which is responsible for our high costs and inefficient systems. Our population is aging. Scientific gains have made treatment more expensive. And, as we conquer infectious diseases, more of our people are subject to long-term, expensive illnesses. But altering payment systems is government's greatest opportunity for reform. And providing health coverage to those unable to secure it through employment or welfare should be a first priority for all those who claim justice is the end of government.

Excess capacity in equipment and facilities is the major cause of inflation in health-care costs. Cost is the greatest barrier to care. And the perverse economic incentive in a fee-for-service payment mechanism leads to that excess capacity. Simply stated, most health care is delivered on a "cost-plus" basis. When the payment is made by a third party, i.e., government or an insurance company, the problem is compounded. Government's role in financing health care involves more than Medicare and Medicaid. Because health benefits are tax deductible, the tax expenditure or lost revenue to the Treasury from our employed population is actually larger than federal spending on health care for the poor.

Regulation could control costs. But as we have painfully learned, regulation alone is both politically untenable and easy for providers to avoid. Real competition might constrain costs, but without some regulation it is likely to curtail benefits, chiefly to those who need them most. So what we must do is structure the market for the sake of equity as well as access.

The government should begin with a program of prospective payment based on vouchers for its Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries in every market capable of sustaining organized health care systems. In order to get that business, health providers in those areas would have to participate in at least one of several competing plans. The plans would be required to provide a minimum but comprehensive set of benefits at a prepaid, fixed amount.

UNDER THE PROPOSAL I have outlined, which owes its inspiration to the pioneering ideas of Professor Alain Enthoven from Stanford University, the voucher would be issued to every eligible individual. It would provide coverage for a comprehensive set of benefits for a set period of time, and yet keep freedom of choice for recipients among the competing plans.

Should this change be employed on a widespread basis by the federal government, the most visible sign to the community would be the rapid formation of a variety of health plans representing organized health-care systems. These new plans would join existing ones, including health maintenance organizations, but would not always resemble them. Some would be hospital-based; others would be physician associations or primary care networks, and still others would be organized by insurance companies or employer groups.

Let me illustrate how it would work. The consumer would be advised every six months of the various plans being offered, and select one. If the consumer decided to pick a plan which provided more services, e.g., chiropractic care, than called for in the basic package, the consumer would pay the difference between the voucher and the plan. Conversely, if the consumer picked a plan which offered the basic benefits, but at less cost than the amount of the voucher, the consumer could keep the difference in cash or use it for additional services. Thus there would be an economic incentive to purchase care prudently.

It would be necessary, of course, for the voucher to be fixed at a high enough rate to encourage plans to compete for it. That does not mean, however, a precipitate rise in costs. It is true that neither Medicaid nor Medicare typically pay 100 percent of customary fees under the present fee-for-service system. But, as has been pointed out, the fee-for-service system encourages excessive utilization. Savings from a system which encourages, by its very nature, controls on utilization should make up the difference. Not only would Medicare recipients be freed of the need to purchase "Medigap" insurance or face high deductibles, but all consumers would benefit because the practice of "cost shifting" by health-care providers would be diminished.

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A lot of money is at stake. In most communities, Medicare and Medicaid combined account for about forty percent of the health dollars spent. Thus, a shift from our current retrospective financing system to a prospective system would have a galvanizing effect on the marketplace, Moreover, the plans would have to compete on the basis of quality as well as efficiency. Instead of the present emphasis on the expensive treatment of acute illness, focus would be placed on prevention and early intervention. Such has been the experience of many well-managed plans, such as the Kaiser system, which demonstrate significantly lower rates of utilization without sacrifice in quality of care.

The point is that most health-care providers would have powerful incentives to be associated with at least one of these competing plans, and government's purchase of care would be the catalyst. This is, if you will, the "soft path" to reforming health-care delivery, but I believe it is more practical than our previous methods.

Not surprisingly, many hospitals and other providers will welcome the change. They are still unremittingly hostile to national health insurance, but it is clear now that the only other alternative to prospective reimbursement is a cap on expenditures. Inevitably, such caps are enforced by denying payment for some benefits that hospitals feel they must provide when ordered by a physician. Collecting for those services from patients is onerous. Billing the government for them under the guise of allowable expenses has become a way of life for an army of creative hospital accountants, and it is still not enough. Finally, many hospitals and physicians are profoundly disturbed about the human consequences of this administration's cuts in Medicaid and Medicare, and are ready to support change.

This form of prepayment is also significantly different from recently enacted legislation which tied reimbursement for Medicare to fixed payments based upon diagnosis. That legislation will encourage health-care providers to claim diagnoses that assure a higher payment, which could result in excessive utilization of services. Already, some enterprising consultants are holding seminars for hospitals to explain methods for evading the new law.

I do not wish to imply that government has no constructive role to play in regulating this marketplace. Quite the contrary. Government, or an agent designated by the government, should certify plans both for assurance of quality as well as fiscal stability. It can also play a valuable role as a broker among the plans, particularly for public beneficiaries. For eight years we operated just such a broker model in Multnomah County, Oregon. Those people who were medically poor had their premiums subsidized by the county. The county was their broker as they chose between competing plans. The clients of this program, called Project Health, received unbiased counseling about the benefits and costs of the various plans. The evaluation of the program indicated that it actually saved about twenty percent of the costs that could have been necessary had it operated according to a traditional fee-for-service system.

The government should also act to insure that no one health plan received a disproportionate number of chronically ill people from its programs. This could be achieved by screening the population as they enrolled, and then providing mandatory assignment to all participating plans. Or, as we did in Multnomah County, such individuals could be referred to a publicly-operated plan, if one is available. I prefer that course, because the publicly-operated plan can also serve as a valuable means of continued competition. But some mechanism must be employed, or some plans will suffer from so-called "adverse selection," and will likely fold.

THE MOST important thing government can do, of course, is provide basic health protection to those who are too impoverished to obtain it for themselves. Liberals and the Democratic party should commit themselves to expanding the Medicaid program, reversing the policies of the Reagan administration. Medicaid should serve not only those who are eligible for welfare (AFDC and SSI), but also those who are "medically needy," including the unemployed and the underemployed, in the same fashion that the food stamp program does. And this expansion should serve the medically needy in every state, as an entitlement, instead of only in some states as is the case now.

It will cost more money, but it is a requirement of a decent society. If the reforms suggested in financing health care are implemented, the costs will be relatively minor because overall utilization will decline, resulting in major savings. To put the matter in clear perspective, it is important to take into account the gains for society from a healthier, more productive population. The poor are the sickest people in our community. They defer health care at a preventive stage, and so frequently receive it in the most costly setting, an emergency room. They are often the chronically ill, and the costs of their care is paid by a hidden tax, added to the hospital and physician bills of the private, paying patient. Just as there is no free lunch, so is there little "charity" care.

It may be objected that states and localities cannot absorb their share of increased Medicaid expenditures. I quite agree. Medicaid, like Medicare, should be wholly a federal responsibility, as a matter of simple equity. It might be well to "swap" this responsibility for ending general revenue sharing, but in any event this is properly a federal responsibility, and it would give the federal government increased flexibility to implement needed reforms.

Many who have been divided over questions of means, share these goals. They believe with a majority of Americans that the poor should not have to depend on charity for the protection of their health. Indeed, they are willing to support the expansion of efficient programs to provide for those in need. Liberals should seek their support.

The assurance of equal access to health care is a *sine qua non* of social justice. As a national community, social justice must be an essential element in our shared vision. This administration denies that. It is time to restore the health of our people to its rightful place on the nation's agenda.

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Ascent of Mount Athos

PEADAR KIRBY

MOUNT ATHOS, the spiritual heart of Eastern Orthodoxy, is a hilly and heavily-wooded peninsula jutting some forty miles into the Aegean Sea in the northeast of Greece. Dominated by the 6,000-foot-high Holy Mountain of Athos itself, the peninsula as a whole is the home of 1,500 monks living in twenty different monasteries and numerous other settlements, cells, and hermitages attached to these.

As a semi-autonomous state linked to Greece it is rivaled only by Vatican City as a political entity established to express and maintain a religious organization. But if the Vatican is dedicated to administration, Mount Athos is dedicated to prayer and asceticism, a point unashamedly upheld in the strict and total ban on women gaining entry to the peninsula. This dates back to a law of 885 and is reinforced by a penalty of two-years imprisonment.

The area's autonomy is underlined by the absence of roads from Greece itself onto Mount Athos, so that the thousands of pilgrims who visit the various monasteries every year must reach the peninsula by boat. For the foreigner special permission from the Ministry of Northern Greece and the police in Thessalonika is necessary, and all pilgrims must go to the administrative center of Karyes on arrival to get an elaborately stamped "visa" from the Holy Community, the government of Mount Athos with one member elected from each of the monasteries for a year.

Within this protective framework exists a rich monastic life virtually unchanged for centuries. The monasteries themselves look more like walled medieval cities built as defensive fortresses against attack not only from the Turks or pirates but also from Western Christians at the time of the Crusades. Equally the center of the monks' lives, the elaborate four-hour-long liturgy from 1:00 to 5:00 every morning, is like an eternal drama which has changed little in form or content since monasticism first began on the peninsula before the ninth century.

Even the simple but wholesome vegetarian meals eaten in refectories, some of them decorated with frescos hundreds of years old, underline the link with tradition. For it is a strict view of adhering to the tradition of the church fathers, believed by the Orthodox to express most fully the apostolic faith, which dominates the monks' lives. Their spiritual and theological reading concentrates on the Bible and the Fathers and even though the young Father Theologos of Stavronikita monastery discussed with me James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which he had just read, he seemed unable to comprehend my very Western questions about developments in religious life or new forms of experimental ministry in de-Christianized areas. For the Orthodox stress on maintaining the tradition which has been handed down appears to the Western Christian as both a rich inheritance and also a straitjacket.

But such a strict adherence to tradition allows, paradoxically, a flexibility and lack of legalism which would be the envy of many Western religious orders. Orthodox monasticism has no rule but is governed by canons of one of the early ecumenical church councils, which one monk explained as a type of framework for their life.

The visitor is struck by the friendly welcome of the monks and their willingness to spend long hours in discussion even into the evening hours when the rest of the monks have gone to their rooms for the customary silence. This flexibility is easily noticed in the almost constant coming and going of monks during the liturgy. It is as if the objective rhythms of the liturgy and the monastic life can allow room for the subjective needs of each of the individual participants not to be stifled.

The visitor to Mount Athos therefore goes back to a world which in many ways seems to pre-date the scientific, philosophical, psychological, and political revolutions since the Renaissance. Its positive element is in its holistic worldview, which relates the person and the world to the saving, unifying work of the triune God. The many dualisms of soul and body, of spirit and matter, of the person and God which underlie so much of Western thought are completely foreign to the Orthodox mind. Perhaps the most challenging expression of this difference is the view that in the liturgy time touches eternity, a view which becomes a rich experience for participants in the monks' liturgy.

BUT EVEN Mount Athos has not been able to escape from the political changes taking place in the world around it. St. Panteleimon's Russian Orthodox monastery, built by the czars to house 1,500 monks and 1,000 pilgrims, now houses only a community of thirty and many of the buildings lie dilapidated

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and unused. The first half of this century saw the end of the Orthodox monarchies not only in Russia but also in Serbia, Bulgaria, and Rumania, and with them the end of a source of lavish patronage for the monasteries.

With the end of this patronage a period of decline set in so that when the 1,000th anniversary of monasticism on Mount Athos was being celebrated in 1963, it was seen by many as "more of a funeral than a festival," as one monk told me. In 1971 for the first time the number of monks dropped below 1,000, but already a reform had begun which has now attracted large numbers of young people to become monks.

This new wave of vocations, I was told, is characterized by a large number of entrants coming from Western Europe and Latin America, and by such people as former left-wing activists, drug addicts, and practitioners of yoga joining the monasteries.

This renewal of monastic life, however, also appears to be characterized by many of the conservative attitudes which dominate the Orthodox church in Greece. It was a young monk in Gregoriou monastery who brought up the *filioque* controversy with me and began to blame the Western Church for the schism in the eleventh century. A bishop, who preferred not to have his name used, admitted that the Greek church is very unecumenical and rather out of touch with theological developments outside the country. He, however, had worked for a time in West Germany.

Underlying much of the conservatism is a strong link with political power deriving from the alliance with the Byzantine empire in the middle ages. This has left a legacy of having a rather subservient attitude to the state, and though the church in Greece protested to the government over proposals to introduce obligatory civil marriage so that the government modified its view, Orthodox theology still appears to provide no basis for the sort of critical attitude to the state which is increasingly taken for granted by theology in the West.

EVEN MORE SO than in Greece this subservience to the state strikes the visitor to Bulgaria. Though church officials constantly affirm that relations with the Communist state are good and that the state allows the church to function freely, this freedom is very much given on the state's terms. Therefore though the church is able to own farms in a country where 98.5 percent of productive land is owned by the state, and though the church has a monopoly to produce all the goods it needs for use in church, it appears to accept a total prohibition by the state on work with young people.

Questioning Orthodox church leaders about the role of the church in a Communist society, I found that they constantly returned to the theme of its being a national church. They proudly point to the church's role in the resurgence of national identity and culture in the last century after five hundred years of Turkish rule, a role admitted by the founder of the Communist state in 1944, Georgi Dimitrov.

But such a self-identity based on the past has its dangers. At Rila monastery, the center of Bulgaria's national self-awakening in the last century, the deputy abbot, Archiman-

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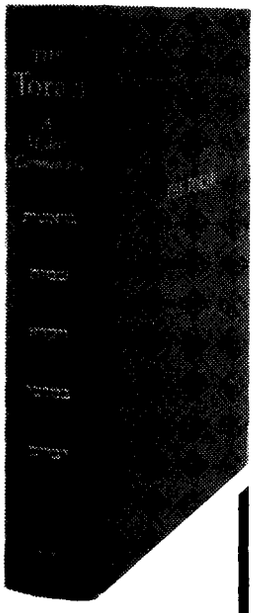

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drite Gavriil, told me that there are now only thirteen monks in a monastery built for three hundred and that the majority of these are old. Despite the participation of young and old, men and women, in the rich two-and-a-half-hour liturgy in Sofia's St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, this lack of vocations to monastic life seems to indicate a growing secularization which may threaten the future of the Orthodox church in Bulgaria more decisively than did the Turks.

Nonetheless, if the Western Christian brings a constant critical eye to bear on this rich alternative Christian tradition, one could not fail to be struck again and again by the deep devotion even of young Orthodox to their church. The same attitude was expressed by the fullness with which young people participated in the liturgy, including young pilgrims rising at 1:00 A.M. in the monasteries to take part in the liturgy.

For if we in the West are more and more emphasizing the incarnate Christ and the immanence of God, the Orthodox refuse to dilute their strong stress on the absolute transcendence of God. It is a stress which, in Mount Athos at least, appears to be answering a thirst for God felt by many young Greeks. We have much to learn from each other.

Stage

REALLY 'GOING ON'

MARSHA NORMAN'S PULITZER WINNER

MARSHA NORMAN once told an interviewer that her subject was "going on." That is an apt description of *Getting Out,* the play that introduced the Louisville author to a national audience, and *It's a Willingness,* which was done on television in 1980. It is a bit more difficult to attach the phrase to *'Night, Mother*, the very effective short play that just won Norman the Pulitzer Prize. After all, her protagonist chooses to commit suicide.

"This is how I say what I thought about it *all* and I say NO," says Jessie, defending her plan to kill herself. "To Dawson and Loretta and the Red Chinese and epilepsy and Ricky and Cecil and you. And me. And hope. I say NO." This list contains the elements of the trap which Jessie sees her life to be, and by the end of the evening — which she had hoped would be a final ordinary evening with her mother, but which turns into her mother's argumentative attempt to keep her alive — we know these people well, both the two on stage and those we never see. Dawson is Jessie's condescending brother and Loretta, her self-absorbed sister-in-law, who are so little aware of Jessie as a person that Dawson gives his sister bedroom slippers every year for Christmas but always in the size that his wife wears. A joke that is not a joke, as is so much that Jessie says, her ironic criticism of Dawson is an example of the often funny, always wrong remarks through which Jessie conveys her pain. Cecil is the husband who left her and Ricky, the son who has become a petty criminal; and she assumes, with reason, that she is partly responsible for both departures. Her epilepsy, or so she believes, was the result of a fall from a horse, which she was riding only to please Cecil. "I fell off the horse because I didn't know how to hold on," she says. "Cecil left for pretty much the same reason."

Jessie learns that she has had epilepsy all her life (it was the cause not the result of the fall) and that her mother, through some odd sense of propriety, kept the disease a secret even from her and, in the process, made it impossible for Jessie to function in the world. The restrictions implicit in her epilepsy, in the response to it rather than the disease itself, reflect a society of limited possibilities, mandatory roles. The mother's loveless marriage, which she remembers with distaste but with no indication that an alternative was possible, is another example of the way in which these women are the creatures of not-so-great expectations, caught in a social and psychological web that gives them very little room to maneuver.

The "Red Chinese," who make their incongruous appearance in Jessie's catalogue, are only ostensibly one of her little jokes. Early in the play, when her mother asks what she is sad about, Jessie says, "Oh, everything from you and me to Red China," and her mother answers, "I think we can leave the Chinese out of this." The line gets a laugh, as it should, but although the outside world makes a minimal appearance in this play, we cannot really leave out the Red Chinese, in their metaphorical role as forces outside the confines of the house in which the action takes place. "I read the papers," Jessie says. "I don't like how things are. And they're not any better out there than they are in here." The sense of helplessness that most of us feel in the face of events in the world at large provides a macrocosmic malaise for the smaller space of the play in which Jessie and her mother have few choices about what to make of their lives.

The set for the play consists of two rooms — kitchen and living room — in the house that Jessie shares with her mother, a playing area marked by a door that leads into Jessie's bedroom, into "absolute nothingness," as Norman's script says. It is a theatrical not a theological description, I assume, an indication that this door is the only exit from the enclosed

"I've had a good life—seventy-five years of self-deception."

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space — and enclosed it is by a tight frame built around the proscenium and edged in black. The rooms are furnished with the kind of comfortable lack of distinction which marks houses where ordinary people live, and Jessie and her mother, in the very fine performances by Kathy Bates and Anne Pitoniak, are just such people in both their pain and their preoccupation with the everyday artifacts of living.

Much of the play has to do with the details of keeping house, ordering groceries, retaining the comfort, because Jessie, who has been taking care of the house since she moved back in with her mother, is intent on preparing her mother for her approaching absence. This activity is, in part, a dramatic strategy of Norman's, a way of using such practicality to emphasize that Jessie's planned suicide is not an act of madness or revenge. Just a way of saying NO. Her mother, who admits at one point that she has an intense fear of death, has mastered the limitations of her life by embracing the small activities and inactivities that fill a day with busy work which has no meaning beyond itself. That is not enough for Jessie. For the first time, in choosing her death, Jessie elects to act rather than be acted upon. Norman's "going on" has relevance to *'Night, Mother*, after all, for "going on," which here becomes not going on, presupposes an attempt to wrest control of a life from outside forces.

GERALD WEALES

Screen

SECOND WIND

A TRUE ORIGINAL

SINCE JEAN-LUC Godard's *Breathless* came out over two decades ago, I don't think a year has gone by when I haven't seen it at least once. On occasion I have seen it a half-dozen times in a month. I find the film inexhaustible, as anyone who has read this column for a while knows. *Breathless* is the one landmark of the medium's history to which discussion here frequently returns. Keeping it in sight is a way I get my bearings with everything else I see. The film is endlessly protean. It continually re-creates itself so that every time I watch it it is new, different, surprising. The movie I saw twenty years ago has completely disappeared now; it has been replaced by one that bears little resemblance to the original. The more I see *Breathless*, the more meditative and absorbing the experience of doing so becomes. No other film is as dense with meaning, as complex and durable, as this one.

What I like about Jim McBride's re-make of *Breathless* is that there is none of what I have just described in it. Twenty years later, McBride has an original response to Godard's classic. That is to say, he still has the kind of response that's possible the first time you see it. The main character who was played by Jean-Paul Belmondo has lost for McBride none of his immediacy, his startling appeal and crazy charm. McBride has somehow kept intact his pristine sense of the movie as just a wild, unlikely story that carries you along by sheer energy. Since that experience of *Breathless* is the one I had lost, McBride's re-make of the movie is a real treat. It's like having a friend of many years, somebody upon whom you have learned to rely, suddenly turn back into the irrepressible, irresponsible kid you first loved.

Richard Gere plays Jesse Lujack, the hero of this *Breathless*, with a nervous languidness. Jesse is loose, easy, purposeless. He's the ultimate laid-back Californian, somebody who knows that if the deal doesn't go through—whatever deal he happens to be working on at the moment—he can always sleep in a park or on the beach. At the same time, Jesse is up-tight, desperate, breathless. He leaves Vegas in a stolen Porsche as if he were a pinball coming out of the chute, and when he gets to L.A. he bounces around town crazily, trying to make all the lights light and the bells ring, to run up a huge score. He steals cars as casually as the pinball player flips the flipper. It's a way of sending himself back up to the top again for another ride down, keeping his game alive.

Los Angeles is the perfect town for Jesse because it's full of illusions. McBride seems to have scouted out every wall painting in L.A. as a location to shoot against. When Jesse is driving, there are porpoises frisking behind him. When he's dodging the cops, there is a Hokusei painting a block long, or Botticelli's Venus in the gear of a roller skater along the front in Venice. The *trompe l'oeil* art with which L.A. has been covered in recent years allows Jesse to careen giddily from one illusion to another. The only trouble with doing so is that if you begin believing in what you see, you could run smack into a brick wall. The most dangerous illusion Jesse has is that a young architecture student he spent a weekend with, Monica (Valerie Kaprisky), is in love with him. The brick wall waiting behind this illusion is the L.A. police department, who are looking for Jesse because in his offhand, off-the-wall way, he's killed a cop.

Jesse is an urban sprite, a jive gadfly, a divine punk. From the material provided by the script on which director McBride collaborated with L.M. Kit Carson, Gere makes Jesse irresistible. He is such a sexy, funny lover, such an appealing fugitive, that I couldn't help identifying with him. Neither could McBride. The limitation of this movie is that McBride likes Jesse too much, and Godard not enough. The French film to which this one finally bears comparison is not the original *Breathless* so much as the recent *Diva*. With all its street-art backgrounds, this *Breathless* is, like *Diva*, a highly stylized piece of work. But that is not the same thing as having a style all its own in the more substantial sense that Godard's film does. Style requires an inventiveness to which McBride could never aspire, and it results in a sort of longevity his film will not attain. McBride's strength is as a filmmaker who can pick up locations as facilely as Jesse picks a lock or a pocket. The film that he has done is terrific, but it is less a re-make of *Breathless* than a knock-off of it, a rip-off. McBride has hot-wired the Godard classic, and taken us for a ninety-minute joy ride.

COLIN L. WESTERBECK, JR.

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Books: CONDEMNATION & CATHARSIS

LOST IN THE COSMOS
THE LAST SELF-HELP BOOK
Walker Percy
Farrar, Straus & Giroux,
$16.50, 252 pp.

Peter Clecak

A SOUTHERNER by birth, a Roman Catholic by choice, physician by training, Walker Percy probably will be remembered as an amateur belletrist. I use the term *amateur* in its best sense here, to locate Percy in a small company of significant American writers who work on their own, without the sustained support of a university, a foundation, or the mass media. A successful novelist — winner of a National Book Award in 1961 for *The Moviegoer* — Percy has in recent years turned to social and cultural criticism, having published *The Message in the Bottle* in 1975.

Lost in the Cosmos presents his estimate of the modern experiment in science, individual freedom, and the "florid," fleshy quest for personal fulfillment. The result to date, according to Percy, can only be described as unrelieved boredom and disappointment for most individuals. The social consequence of such self-defeating self-indulgence is an impending nuclear catastrophe, probably less than a century away. A remnant may survive; in fact, with luck, the survivors might even manage to reinvent the destructive wheel of civilization, either on this shattered planet or at some distant site in the vast and lonely cosmos.

Given this grim projection, a self-help book is the least Percy can bequeath us, even if it promises to be the last instance of a discredited genre. A small beam of hope illuminates the gloom, however, for Percy remains faithful to the least likely outcome of his scenario: a return to a particularly stark, and despite Catholic trappings, classically Protestant vision of salvation of the self through the shed blood of Jesus. Here is the only possible route of escape, or rather the only remaining mode of witnessing in the end times. "Come back" to the narrow path, the path that only a few will be wise enough to pursue: this is the message in Percy's new bottle of prose.

The message, I should hasten to add, does not come in the style of contemporary Protestant evangelists Percy scorns. But it should be conceded that his intended audience is a tougher one than that, say, of his soil brother, Jimmy Swaggart. Impervious to apocalyptic rhetoric followed by soft tearful altar calls, Percy's readers are likely to be skeptics and unbelievers to whom the Gospel is as foolish as it was to the Greeks in Paul's day. (Percy exempts the Jews on the grounds that God will care for them, thereby removing the stumbling block that troubled Paul even more than the sophistication of the Greeks. Percy is after the Greeks anyway, so Jewish readers may ride more or less free of charge.)

Unable wholly to escape Southern Protestant traditions by an act of conversion or by the choice of a medical vocation, Percy chooses a literary avocation which only reinforces his unintended, and somewhat jaded, evangelical vision: whereas "the painter and the sculptor are the Catholics of art," possessing the advantage of tangible intermediaries between themselves and creation, "the writer," he declares, "is the Protestant. He works alone in a room as bare as a Quaker meeting house with nothing between him and his art but a Scripto pencil, like God's finger touching Adam. It is harder on the nerves." Though often hard on the reader's nerves, too, *Lost in the Cosmos* does not come off merely as a crypto-Protestant exercise, a dull, sincere gospel tract. Percy's seemingly unpalatable message is served up as an elegant, erudite, and often very funny satire on contemporary life that I suspect will titillate many modern Greeks (and perhaps a few Jews not offended by his condescending indulgence), even as it convicts them of a multitude of sins associated with the unrestrained self.

For many readers, the vision of destruction (to borrow a formulation from Percy) may come as "not unrelievedly bad news," but rather only as "putatively bad news," even comforting in its way. The modern Greeks, Percy suggests, would rather be put out of their misery than accept his endorsement of the "preposterous" Christian vision of salvation. This sets up the central rhetorical problem — and tension — of the book: the author must make the consequences of enlightenment, science, and narcissism, not to mention corruptions of his own religious tradition, seem more deadly and more preposterous than the largely discredited Christian story. "As time goes on . . . the gap between our knowledge of the Cosmos and our knowledge of ourselves widens and we become even more alien to the very Cosmos we understand, and our predicament ever more extreme." "In the end," Percy concludes, diffidently proposing a Pascalian wager, it is the Judeo-Christian "remedy, it and no other, which is specified by the preposterous predicament of the human self as its sole remedy."

Percy conveys the absurdity and deadliness of the modern experiment in misused freedom through a parody of self-help literature, a parody which is by turns devastating and sophomoric, sharp-eyed and heavy-handed. Using the familiar materials of mass culture, from the pop quiz and facile questionnaire to the glib pop science speculations of a Carl Sagan, Percy pieces together his mosaic against modern men and women. There are brief essays on every distressing side of this modern self — the bored self, the frightened self, the envious self, the impoverished self — leading to an extended semiotic essay on the self marooned in the cosmos.

Percy is at his best when depicting varieties of folly, for example, when he

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recounts efforts to achieve the final dethronement of the "triadic creature" called man through unsuccessful conversations with chimpanzees and dolphins. Similarly, his spoof on sexual excess cast in the form of the Last Phil Donahue Show exhibits flashes of satiric brilliance. But the semiotic effort to define the hopeless creature "which is unique in its ability to understand the world but not itself" seems a trifle strained. This exercise in "signs" and "signifiers" strikes me as a clumsy recasting of a familiar if not altogether convincing point about our limited capacity for self-knowledge. In any case, I must confess to an inability to follow the argument that the "sign-user" remains forever beyond his own comprehension merely because of a semiotic technicality. No matter — the essential point survives its semiotic mutilation. And Percy takes us on a brief tour from the Fall from the semiotic Eden to the present moment — at the edge of wholesale violence — via a catalogue of boredom and disappointment: we are bored, he claims, with each other, with marriage, work, science, art, even consumption. The retreat to the "spirit of the erotic" in the face of all this offers only momentary relief, and then quickly cheapens and trivializes sexual activity (which he takes to be rampant). All other facets of the autonomous self having been explored and exhausted, we move on to the last diversion of this self: a nihilistic, violent consummation made possible by technological advances.

By way of sealing his case, Percy presents two Space Odysseys. In the first, an earthship finds its way to a distant planet only to be turned away by superior intelligences because the human creature has failed to attain C3 consciousness, has not, this is to say, "become aware of its predicament, sought help, and received it." In the final odyssey, the space voyagers return to a dead earth to ponder the options — all of them bleak including the one presented by a surviving Christian, one Abbott Liebowitz, who remains a witness to the Word (and perhaps the last pope by default), even after heaven and earth — at least earth — have passed away.

Though it aims to be a rhetorically tough, uncompromising defense of Christianity against a self-seeking world (and church) grown alien to its persona, *Lost in the Cosmos* is itself finally a self-indulgent fancy, not far off the mark of the self-help literature Percy parodies. Using the satirist's broad license, Percy dismisses all claims of his contemporaries. There may be plenty of "decent folk" left, he concedes, only to wonder "where . . . all the children molesters come from?" Some genuinely "religious folk" may be found, he allows, "though for every Mother Teresa, there seem to be 1,800 nutty American nuns, female Clint Eastwoods who have it in for men and are out to get the Pope." Of twentieth century women, only Mother Teresa, Helen Keller, and Eudora Welty (an "intact" personality) escape his scorn. In a word, Percy finds no redeeming value in people, politics, culture or, for the most part, religion.

This condemnation of the world is simply too facile, too sweeping, too final. And though I am grateful that Percy does not sink to humorless prose to recreate once again Philip Rieff's psychological man or Christopher Lasch's narcissist, I am offended by his apparent decision to respond to this world rather more in the manner of Swift's disappointed Gulliver than as a witness to the love of God.

In one sense, the faint Christian message can be cut along the perforated line and detached. The book will sell and the satire can be apprehended as a delicious conservative catharsis, an exercise in the author's — and reader's — superiority to the herd: to women, to the "100,000,000 fundamentalist Christians" roaming the land, to nearly everyone. Percy thus permits his readers to join him in what he calls "transcending" others ("I understand you, but you can't understand me.") Nothing could be closer to one of the mean spirits of our time, a spirit which is less pervasive, I think, than many critics contend, though nonetheless virulent enough not to require further care and feeding.

Taken another way, Percy's dismissal of the human enterprise seems to me to be structured by a mean-spirited apprehension of his own religious norm. Consider the new law of the cosmos which he proposes: "If you're a big enough fool to climb a tree and like a cat refuse to come down, then someone who loves you has to make as big a fool of himself to rescue you." Precisely. But if God is foolish enough to rescue someone as dispirited as Percy's satiric persona, why should He/She desert the rest of creation? More to the point, why should Walker Percy?

In the shadow of Maoism

SON OF THE REVOLUTION

Liang Heng and Judith Shapiro

Knopf, $15, 292 pp.

CHINA

ALIVE IN THE BITTER SEA

Fox Butterfield

Times Books, $19.95, 457 pp.

Nicholas R. Clifford

TEN or a dozen years ago, at least half of the students in my courses in modern Chinese history would have considered themselves to be, if not Maoists, then at least sympathic to Mao's aims for the Chinese revolution. Those were the years in which rapturous visitors told us that China was a country that had conquered not only the problems that had beset her throughout history — famine, flood, corruption, drugs, and the like — but also many of the problems that have beset the modern West — alienation, purposelessness, greed, and the emptiness of a consumer society. William Hinton, Han Su-yin and others wrote of the new China, of the miracles that had occurred in the two decades since liberation, and of the ever bright future facing the country under the leadership of the Great Helmsman.

In 1973, however, with the publication of his *Chinese Shadows*, Simon Leys broke sharply with this orthodoxy, and although many dismissed his views at the time, much that has come out since the death of Mao has validated them. Nor

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are such opinions restricted to westerners; in 1981 Peking released a long statement setting forth the currently orthodox version of its own history; its gist is that while Mao was indeed a "great proletarian revolutionary," towards the end of his life his success went to his head, and thus he led his country into the disasters of the Great Leap Forward of 1958 and the Cultural Revolution of the late sixties. Both books under review here are important for this revaluation of Maoism. Neither is written by a three-week tourist, an official guest, or a China-watcher forced to do his research in the Hoover Institute or Hong Kong. Liang Heng is Chinese and Fox Butterfield a Harvard-trained China scholar who brought a knowledge of China's language, history, and culture to his work as the first correspondent for the *New York Times* in Peking since 1949.

Liang Heng's is a painful book to read, the autobiography of a young man who found himself, at the age of twelve, caught up in the storms of the Cultural Revolution. His mother, denounced in the anti-Rightist campaign of 1957, had been divorced by her husband, who wished to protect not only his own career as journalist, but also the future careers of his children; in 1966 it was now his turn to be pilloried as a reactionary, to endure the humiliations which were the lot of intellectuals and professionals in those days. Cut loose from his family, young Liang, like so many others, found in the Cultural Revolution a chance to travel, marching with his Red Guard friends to Jinggangshan (the birthplace of Mao's peasant Communism in 1927), to Canton, and to Peking, developing the kind of teen-age street-wise skills that were necessary for survival in those days. Caught up in the ecstasy of the early days of the Revolution, he soon came to see the dark side as well, and there is a poignant juxtaposition of two scenes: one of a crowd in the Chinese capital, rushing to touch the hand of a man who had touched the hand of Chairman Mao; the other, a few days later, of two Red Guards raping a girl on the train which carried him home to Changsha. Yet the story has a happy ending, if that is the word for it; his unusual height and his talent for basketball led to a job in a factory, and a coveted Changsha residence card, so that he could play for the team. Athletic privilege leads to more privilege (in China as in America!) and through his friendship with the daughter of a high-ranking Party member (their preliminary courtship cut off by her father, who does not want his girl to marry beneath her into the proletariat) he gained entrance to the University to study English. There it was that he met, courted and ultimately (with the help of Vice-Chairman Deng Xiaoping) wedded his English teacher, Judith Shapiro, with whom he wrote the book, and with whom he now lives in New York.

Liang Heng was not only intelligent but also lucky; he is where he is today in part because of his access to privilege. This is one of the aspects of communism in China that Fox Butterfield finds particularly distressing. It a society where wealth counts for little (there is little that money can buy) it is rank that is sought after, for rank gives access to *te quan* (privilege). Even those without rank may, if they are in the right place at the right time (as Liang was) "go through the back door" *(dzou hou men)* and achieve their ends in ways similar to those that Chinese have used for centuries, and which have survived Mao's efforts to build a "new socialist man" with a new socialist morality.

Those who still want to believe in a Maoist China that has conquered the problems of the past will find Butterfield's work (which has recently won the American Book Award) deeply disturbing. His China is a country that still practices infanticide, where girls are still sold, and where millions of peasants live barely above the level of subsistence. He cites recent findings showing that during the three years after the Great Leap (1959-1961), some sixteen and a half million more people died than would have done so normally; that during the Cultural Revolution some four hundred thousand people were killed, and suggests that the true figure may be somewhat higher, including not simply the "counter-revolutionaries" who were hounded or tortured to death, but those who were caught up in the fighting of 1967-1968, which in some parts of China reached the proportions of a civil war.

Mao's death has brought something of a surcease from the Chairman's style of government by mass movement. But Deng's China has its problems too, and it is clear that the goal of making China a "great socialist state" through the Four Modernizations by the end of the century is not going to be easy. Butterfield cites the mistakes that have been made in rapid industrialization; the great new steel

> *I am both Jew and Catholic, whether Jew or Catholic like it or not, and generally they do not, usually have no use for each other, in fact, and even less for me. The Jews think I have apostasized, and the Catholics think I am a Jew. They don't think of Jesus and Mary as Jewish. But me? I'm still a Jew. And they're right. I am. Catholics are a queer lot – I've never really gotten used to them. I admire their, our, faith, adopted it in fact, but I wish they loved learning more, as they loved it in the High Middle Ages, loved science and art more, . . . just as they loved them in the age of the great Giotto and Roger Bacon and the monk Copernicus and the great Galileo . . . We are a church of sinners, yes, but can't sinners love science and art?*
>
> Walker Percy
> *Lost in the Cosmos*

> *If a Russian writer or artist is banished to Siberia, it is front-page news in Europe and the United States. . . . But if a Chinese dissident is exiled to Qinghai, Peking's equivalent of Siberia, the story is cut to a few paragraphs on an inside page or not printed at all . . . I sometimes felt there was a double standard – one for the Russians, who are Europeans, another for the Chinese, who are Asians and therefore not supposed to have the same feelings for human rights and life.*
>
> Fox Butterfield
> *China*

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works at Wuhan which need so much electricity that they can operate only one or two days a week, and the huge Baoshan complex at Shanghai, built to use the most modern Japanese, German, and American technology, but which proved to be unable to use Chinese low-grade ore, making necessary the importation of Australian ore, and the building of a new seaport 130 miles south to accommodate the bulk carriers which could not reach Shanghai. Furthermore Deng has, after a short-lived experiment with intellectual liberalism (remember "Democracy Wall"?) has now — like Stalin, like Mao — cracked down on the cultural life of the country. Butterfield managed to meet and to speak to a number of the members of Peking's small dissident community. Precisely because, unlike their counterparts in Russia and Eastern Europe, they are hardly known in the West, this is one of the most valuable parts of the book.

Butterfield's description of China is not an encouraging one, and its picture of a gray, corrupt, and inefficient Stalinism replacing the dynamic (if often wrong-headed) dynamism of Mao may well be too bleak. But because of China's size alone, what happens to her will affect us all. We must continue to wish her well, and to do what we can to help; and the first step is to see China as she is, and not (as we've done so often in the past) as we wish her to be.

The pill & the pew

THE PILL, JOHN ROCK, AND THE CHURCH

Loretta McLaughlin

Little, Brown, $15.95, 243 pp.

John Deedy

AT A TIME when the contraceptive pill is as much a part of Catholic women's regimen as orange juice, and when much of the clergy seems more bemused than persuaded by *Humanae Vitae*, the 1968 birth-control encyclical, it is difficult to imagine the contention generated less than twenty-five years ago by the scientific discovery than a synthetic progresterone could be produced which would block ovulation, allowing a woman to go the number of per pregnancies. But large contention there was, and not just from Catholics.

The birth-control pill was the abortion issue of its day, and was so widely regarded as socially immoral and medically questionable that even drug companies, which stood to make large fortunes in its manufacture, hung back wanting no part of any compound that interfered with the menstrual cycle. The risks were too great, especially the social risks.

Inevitably the drug companies became "realistic," the pill took its place alongside the aspirin in the medicine cabinet, and most of the scare rumors which accompanied the pill's development (e.g., that it would postpone menopause, making women fertile into their sixties) proved to be exaggerated — although doctors do warn of side-effects, particularly among women who smoke while on the pill.

Among the astonishing details in that chain of events is that the pill was primarily developed by a man who was born Catholic and who remains devout into his ninety-second year, and secondly that this ultimate contraceptive technology originated in Massachusetts, a state which at the time held it a crime to exhibit, sell, prescribe, or provide contraceptives, or even to disseminate birth-control information. The primary developer was, of course, Dr. John Rock, and this is his story, effectively told by Loretta McLaughlin, medical writer for the *Boston Globe* and former science writer for the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University.

McLaughlin's book deals with the scientific aspects of the pill's development and their ecclesiastical ramifications, and is more informative on the latter simply because this is an area that has not been mined before in the author's context, certainly not in the same depth. McLaughlin recounts the pressures placed on Rock, from the most sophisticated, eventually involving Harvard itself, to the most petty, including efforts to have him excommunicated for among other things being so bold as to receive communion Sundays at Immaculate Conception, his parish church. Boston's Archbishop Richard Cushing, however, never acted against him.

McLaughlin contends that Cushing was not insensitive to what Rock was trying to accomplish. Nor, she writes, was he unaware that if Rock succeeded in changing the church's position on birth control — a possibility thought to be bolstered by Rock's book *The Time Has Come: A Catholic Doctor's Proposals to End the Battle Over Birth Control* (Knopf, 1963) — some of the credit would accrue to Cushing himself. Thus he let Rock be.

Part of that theorizing may be unfair to Cushing, who was not a particularly calculating person. But there is little doubt that Cushing was alert — although how early is another question — to what Rock was up to, and he did not judge him for that. Indeed there is the wonderful story told by Rock's journalist nephew, Jerrold Rock Hickey, of Cushing greeting Rock during the Council years with the affectionate comment: "Johnny boy, Johnny boy, what have you done? You've gone and got the whole Vatican pregnant." McLaughlin does not include the story in her book, but it belongs there if only for the clue it provides to the attitude at Boston Chancery's top level.

Admittedly by the time Cushing jested with Rock some of the heat was off those on the other side of the issue. When the pope's own Lenten preacher was displaying an open mind about the pill, it would have been impossible to pillory the man in the pew who had discovered it. Similarly so when cardinals, theologians, and at least one national hierarchy were straightforwardly favoring the pill as moral.

Earlier what protected Rock, or more specifically his research, was the notion that a pill to control pregnancy was outlandish, beyond the grasp of science. Even the medical and pharmaceutical communities were dubious, and planned parenthood groups were far more hopeful

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about the prospects of the intrauterine device. Let the man play. Also protecting him was his reputation as a specialist in fertility, and in fact his pill research did begin as a quest for the key to fertility for women who could not conceive. Instead he discovered a contraceptive.

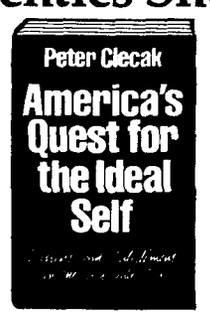
An experience of my own accents how general was disbelief then that a contraceptive pill was within the reach of anyone. In 1956 or 1957, when I was editor of the diocesan newspaper in Worcester, Mass., I was approached by a young woman who worked for Dr. Gregory Pincus, Rock's principal collaborator. She wanted to share a moral dilemma. She told of research under way at the Worcester Foundation for Experimental Biology in nearby Shrewsbury, where Pincus was based, which involved development of a birth-control pill and field experiments with women in Puerto Rico. (The experiments were in fact conducted there because to have attempted to carry them out in Massachusetts would have been to chance criminal prosecution.) I took the woman's dilemma to John Wright, then Bishop of Worcester, who exclaimed, "For God's sake, tell her to stick to typing." Ironically Wright was to become one of the severest critics of the pill and one of the staunchest defenders of *Humanae Vitae*.

Inevitably in pioneering in so morally sensitive an area as human reproduction, many of Rock's tactics are open to critical judgment, not only in work developing the pill, but in earlier experimentation in test-tube conception. Here, for instance, women slated for hysterectomies were used as unwitting egg donors; young interns offered their sperm (Rock paid them a small fee and provided a private cubicle decorated with nudes to help "inspire the young men to action"); and when success was achieved and one woman's egg was at last fertilized, it was carelessly lost by a laboratory aide. "That's understandable," excused Rock. "After all, it was just a little thing." Such incidents make possible the charge that Rock trifled with female privacy and dignity, as well as with life itself. Certainly he indulged in procedures which not only would not be tolerated today, but which Rock himself — sensitized by new appreciations of female personhood and awesome advances in embryology — would likely repudiate. The book broaches some ethical problems, but more in passing than by way of serious scrutiny. This is to be regretted.

McLaughlin's objective, at which she nonetheless suceeds, is to portray Rock as both humanitarian and moralist, whose medical breakthrough not only provided the world with a feasible means at last of bringing population problems under control, but also the church with a method for family planning which squared with Catholic morality. His intention was first to save the family and, after that, the family of humankind. The world accepted the pill, but the church served up *Humanae Vitae*. "The hierarchy has made another terrible mistake," Rock said in reflecting on the news. "They already have lost the fight on birth control, and now they will lose the fight on sterilization and abortion."

The prophet repudiated read the future with astonishing accuracy.

Don't Sell the Seventies Short!



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Correspondence

(Continued from page 354)

cally, rather than as with capitalism, by the market. Does democratic socialism mean anything other than that economic decisions are to be made by democratically elected politicians? Steinfels, however, quotes, with apparent approval and without apparent irony, the statement of a Socialist that he finds the market and democracy to be "somewhat inseparable"—a condition surely akin to being "somewhat pregnant."

As *Commonweal*'s editorials show, many religious liberals share this attraction for democratic socialism, although it often takes the guise of favoring substantial political intervention in the economy while condemning capitalism as selfish and immoral. From a religious perspective, a major purpose of Novak is to show that Catholic social teaching which reflects this view rests in large part on a misunderstanding of economics, and, to some extent, of the political sphere; and therefore warrants reassessment.

A major deficiency in such teaching, which Novak is not alone in identifying,

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is its virtually exclusive focus on the distribution, as opposed to the production, of goods and services. Individuals have "rights" to "adequate" amounts of various goods, i.e., food, shelter, medical care, etc., but the availability of these goods is simply assumed. In the real world, however, the basic necessities of life do not arrive like manna from heaven, but are dependent on the willingness of most humans to work; absent a system of slave labor, some means must be found to persuade individuals to produce the requisite goods and services.

Steinfels acknowledges the importance to the economy of entrepreneurship, but he fails to recognize that it is, as Marxists say, no accident, that it is neither celebrated by nor associated with socialism. Capitalism fosters entrepreneurship by providing the opportunity to realize profits from successful ventures. Such an incentive is lacking under purely socialist systems, for one's share of resources depends on one's needs, rather than on one's ability to produce. Whatever its flaws, capitalism has clearly been productively superior to socialism. We know, for example, that in the Eastern bloc, a disproportionate share of the agricultural output is produced by the tiny capitalist sector which, of necessity, is permitted to exist. Such a result only confirms what every elementary economics course teaches: distribution, or consumption, and production are interrelated.

Government economic policies, however, usually ignore this elementary truth, and the predictable effects of such policies are evident in many areas.

Rent control is supposed to make housing more "affordable" by curbing the "excessive" profits of landlords. The New York rent control law, still in effect, was originally imposed as an "emergency" measure during the World War II period. Mute testimony to its effects on the housing supply may be seen in the abandoned and vandalized buildings stretching across the Bronx.

The Wagner Act was intended to give power to "exploited" workers by requiring employers to bargain with unions. After decades of NLRB and court rulings which have had the effect of curtailing the flexibility of employers and their power to hire and fire, and have also increased the wages in unionized sectors, many key and once flourishing industries are now in a decline. Layoffs in the auto industry were underway well before the current recession. They reflect the facts that union work rules and wage increases which outstripped productivity produced cars which were both more expensive than and inferior in quality to those of foreign competitors.

Where has the existence of generous government transfer payments not proved incompatible with sustained increases in productivity? Certainly, this has been the case in Britain, France, West Germany, and the United States. Again, it is surely no coincidence that the exceedingly generous — and socially expensive — unemployment benefits now in place in West Germany, after twelve years of governance by the Social Democrats, coexist with a level of unemployment unknown since the immediate postwar period and a faltering economy which reflects the diminished competitiveness of German products.

As transfer payments become more generous, there is less incentive to take jobs paying little more than the benefits. . . . Even "menial" jobs serve as necessary stepping stones to the acquisition of skills and higher income. If individuals have no economic incentive to take the only type of jobs for which their minimal skills equip them, they will be unable to progress.

Despite lip-service to the need to increase productivity, political intervention into the economy is almost invariably distributionist, for obvious political reasons; politicians gain votes by extending benefits to various interest groups, including industries; it is certain that they will lose votes by reducing particular benefits and far from certain that there will be an off-setting gain; politicians are not spending their own money and will probably have left office when the bills come due. . . .

There is little historical evidence that politicians have been competent economic decision-makers, and none at all to suggest that democratic socialist politicians will be either more competent or less governed by self-interest than their predecessors. Why, then, do so many religious leaders claim that substantial government intervention into the economy is not only empirically but morally necessary?

If Steinfels's review is intended to provide justification for such a religious position, this suggests that it amounts to a conclusive presumption, one that no evidence, however compelling, can rebut.

MARY M. ASH

My larger faith

Washington, D.C.

To the Editors: You would not expect me to admire Peter Steinfels's review of *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* [Jan. 14.-Feb. 11], either for its immoderation or for its basic unfairness, the like of which I can never remember seeing in *Commonweal*. In some places failing to see points which are obvious, and in others making difficulties where they are none, Mr. Steinfels pretends to a lack of sympathy and intelligence which he usu-

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ally does not manifest. Since he continues to be a democratic socialist, while I no longer do, there will be plenty to argue about *after* getting each other's views straight.

He cites several passages from books of mine published in 1969, 1971, 1972, and 1974. In their original contexts and at their appearance, each of these passages made valid points. One could properly complain of uptight and caged personalities, for example, when Richard Nixon and "the best and brightest" still set the style, a style I saw plenty of at Harvard during 1960-65, and, nonetheless, later express dismay at the sudden collapse of standards and the opposite excesses of "liberation." Without recanting their appearance at an earlier time, I would now no longer write such passages. This is, in part, because great changes have since occurred in our society (some fruitful, some not) and, in part, because I have since begun to understand our system more fairly and in comparison with other systems. Then, too, I came to see how the ideology and adversarial intentions of persons in my intellectual class had affected my vision in an anti-capitalist, romantically socialist direction. Following Santayana (although I am a believing Catholic and not, in his sense, a skeptic), I have practiced skepticism, especially about my own opinions.

So doing, I began to see that I had earlier acquired from Catholic traditions, from the liberal arts, and from progressive intellectuals a great many biases against capitalism and the corporations (only some instances of which Mr. Steinfels cites). I have gradually discovered that these *are* biases, and that there is much good that one must write down on the other side of the ledger. This does not mean that individual corporations, or the tripartite system of democratic capitalism taken as a whole, do not have serious faults; they do. Such sins must be assessed in a fair context, judged against appropriate and relevant ideals (not socialist ideals), and compared with existing (or proximately realizable) alternatives. . . .

A number of autobiographical passages in *Spirit* suggest briefly how and why I have changed my mind about the actual practice and underlying theory of democratic socialism, and have come to prefer the practice and underlying theory of democratic capitalism. . . .

My own ideal of political consistency was well stated by Winston Churchill in an essay by that name in 1932: "A Statesman in contact with the moving current of events and anxious to keep the ship on an even keel and steer a steady course may lean all his weight now on one side and now on the other. His arguments in each case when contrasted can be shown to be not only very different in character, but contradictory in spirit and opposite in direction: yet his object will throughout have remained the same. His resolves, his wishes, his outlook may have been unchanged; his methods may be verbally irreconcilable. We cannot call this inconsistency. In fact it may be claimed to be the truest consistency."

Any theologian or philosopher who chooses, as I have, to ply his trade close to the texture of movements and events faces a criterion as difficult in its own proper way as the one Churchill sets before the statesman. Further, the concept of "story" in theology, a concept my work has helped to further, helps to shed light on those changes of mind which do not result from changes of principle so much as from changes of experience and perception. . . .

As for the reasons behind my changes of mind, these are hardly at all due to changes of principle and almost entirely due to changes in perception and in judgment about facts. . . . The experience of a conversion in judgments about political economy is not altogether unlike a religious conversion, but not so deep. Robert Heilbroner, e.g., describes how Marxism is more like a way of seeing than like a scientific theory, and this is also true for democratic socialism, so that moving in *that* direction is often experienced as a conversion. Does the Steinfels Doctrine hold that one can move *only* in that direction?

In any case, moving away from democratic socialism is more like moving away from a too-narrow faith than like changing one's principles. This is particularly true when one replaces the vision of democratic socialism with the vision of democratic capitalism. For the latter affirms the right and duty of the political system, and even more of the moral-cultural system, to modify and to check the economic system. Democratic capitalism is neither *laissez-faire* nor free enterprise alone. Moreover, those who cherish democratic capitalism are not all "capitalists," in the narrow sense of owners of the means of industrial production; workers and non-profit professionals also cherish it. Nor does the tripartite system consist only of its economic part. Nor are ethnics exempt from cherishing it; new generations of immigrants keep streaming toward it.

Thus, becoming a democratic capitalist, a person moves beyond the principles of democratic socialism, but without denying the impulses which led him to that perspective in the first place. It is the inability of real-world socialism to fulfill its own principles that first inspires doubt. "The twentieth-century is a graveyard for inadequate socialist dreams." Democratic capitalism feels like a more realistic and larger world than that of democratic socialism, as Christianity feels like a more realistic vision (less elitist, more attuned to evil in the world) than that of the great Greek philosophers. Virtually everything important to democratic socialism can be incorporated within a democratic capitalist vision, but with a firmer sense of balance, especially in regard to the dangers inherent in the political system and above all in the bureaucratic, administrative state. Democratic socialism seems like a simpler, more naive, too trusting view both of human beings and of the state. . . .

Finally, Mr. Steinfels mentions "dozens and dozens" of errors in the book. This surprises me. Many skillful readers helped me to eliminate errors. Naturally, any that remain are my fault alone. Mr. Steinfels identifies only one, in the chapter on Niebuhr. He concedes that I was correct on the substance of the point, Niebuhr's growing skepticism about socialism, but incorrectly used the wrong detail and revealed ignorance about the exact parliamentary vote involved. Four different Niebuhr experts read that chapter, failing to note how my citation of

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detail misled them as well as myself. I am glad Steinfels — who knows the relevant history well, having studied it abroad and in New York — caught it. I have made a correction on this point for later editions and will appreciate learning from any readers about any other mistakes of fact or logic.

My book pioneers a new area; much remains to be done; I expect to know much more about these things by 1990 than I now know in 1983. I invite the collaboration even of those who, in the end, do not agree with me on all the points in dispute. Yet to the extent that my critics have been reduced to *ad hominem* attacks, my best arrow has struck home. And the exact location of that "home" is the one shred of socialism still hanging precariously, its claim to a monopoly on moral ideals and the aspirations of the human spirit.

Steinfels thinks the vision of democratic capitalism — a vision of sin, imperfect institutions, singular decisions, and much future shock — is immoderate. What, then, does he think of the vision of socialism, according to his friend and mine, Michael Harrington? Chapter XIV of *Socialism* begins:

> Finally, there is the vision of socialism itself.
>
> This is not an immediate program, constrained by what is politically possible, or even the projection of a middle distance in which structural changes might take place. It is the idea of an utterly new society in which some of the fundamental limitations of human existence have been transcended. Its most basic premise is that man's battle with nature has been completely won and there is therefore more than enough of material goods for everyone. As a result of this unprecedented change in the environment, a psychic mutation takes place: invidious competition is no longer programmed into life by the necessity of a struggle for scarce resources; cooperation, fraternity, and equality become natural. In such a world man's social productivity will reach such heights that compulsory work will no longer be necessary. And as more and more things are provided free, money, that universal equivalent by means of which necessities are rationed, will disappear.

That, in very brief outline, is what socialism ultimately is. It will never come to pass in its ideal form, yet it is important to detail the dream in order to better design each approximation of it.

I would not myself entitle Harrington's vision "Ultrasuper democraticsocialism," but it does lack the sense of sin, hazard, singular decision-making, and concern for the hard tasks of producing wealth and protecting pluralism which democratic capitalist societies already embody and which occupy the first nine chapters of my book.

Finally, one should notice that a Catholic and ethnic horizon, emphasizing community, tradition, the persistence of evil, and faith, quite alters the horizon of Manchester liberalism and utilitarianism, as I alter it at many places in *Spirit*. That, indeed, may constitute the most significant point of originality in *Spirit*, as more than one reviewer has observed.

MICHAEL NOVAK

A legitimate system

Salem, Va.

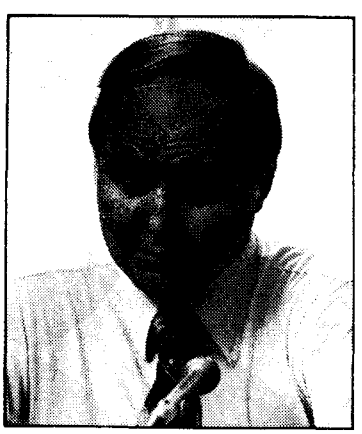
To the Editors: I appreciate the fair and careful treatment of my book, *The Ethic of Democratic Capitalism*, by executive editor Peter Steinfels. Such treatment is all too rare among Christians dealing with such hot issues as war and peace, abortion, nuclear power, and the moral assessment of economic systems. I believe a great deal of evidence and moral argumentation can be marshaled for various perspectives, and none should be too quickly or easily dismissed.

I took up the challenge to defend "democratic capitalism" as a practically and morally viable system, but to do so with awareness of its flaws and, most importantly, to propose constructive options within the limits and possibilities of that combination. I am most concerned about that latter task.

Nevertheless, I have made rather strong legitimating remarks about a system that many faithful and intelligent Christians think is corrupt and destruc-

CONFESSION OF A CATHOLIC

Michael Novak



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tive. (Incidentally, I have found that when Christians of a conservative economic and political perspective disagree with me, they often say I am naive, sentimental, or utopian. When Christians of the left disagree, I am often charged with immorality. Somehow, the former is easier to bear.) Mr. Steinfels thinks that capitalism is more destructive of pluralism and democracy than supportive. Let me respond to his criticisms of how I handle the issues of pluralism and democracy.

First, pluralism. It seems to me that one of the strongest virtues of a market economic system is that it maximizes the discretionary power of individuals and families to dispose of a large portion of their incomes according to their own values. Most — if not all — socialist perspectives intend a larger public sphere, with public disposition of larger amounts of the economic pie. I am persuaded that the economic freedom of democratic capitalism is an important support of social pluralism. Persons choose to support all kinds of groups, associations, schools, churches, journals, activities, etc. with that discretionary income. I believe it is true that a multiplicity of private associations correlate with democratic capitalist arrangements because people will support their various values in organized form if they have the ready income to do it. Socialism restricts that available income.

Second, Mr. Steinfels takes me to task for underestimating the power of private economic enterprises to shape, limit, and distort the political sphere. He suggests that a closer examination would uncover a very heavy influence indeed. I would welcome that further examination because I think there is considerable evidence on both sides, and that private economic influence waxes and wanes according to the political and economic mood of the country. It still seems difficult to disagree that political will in this country in the last two decades has transferred a growing percentage of the GNP from private to public disposition (the last two years excluded.) Peter Drucker, for example, argues that "There is no parallel in government history — certainly not in peacetime — to the expansion of public spending in the United States in the last fifteen years." *(The Unseen Revolution,* p. 174). The point is not that there is too much or too little disposed of publicly, the point is that great political leverage has been exercised through democratic processes to execute that shift. That leverage has not been exercised by private corporations, by and large.

So, I'll stand by my contention that political power is sufficiently distinguished from economic power to warrant calling the system "democratic capitalism" rather than "corporate collectivism," as Michael Harrington terms it. But a more important task is to keep that distinction clear so that neither swallows the other.

Mr. Steinfels finds it curious that I should use democratic socialism as a foil in reacting to my previous economic opinions. After all, he says, it is not exactly a looming presence in American politics. He's right, of course, if one takes the whole scope of the American scene into account. But there are many smaller contexts in which neo-Marxist critiques of capitalism and democratic socialist perspectives are a looming presence, so looming that dissent is barely and rarely tolerated. Such contexts are: a significant number of church and interdenominational theological schools, many ecumenical conferences on social issues organized by ecumenical agencies, and many conferences dealing with the church's mission abroad. I've been the object of a number of ritual slayings in precisely those contexts. However, I well knew that if I needed a few positive strokes I could go speak to almost any suburban congregation of our churches. I have enough spiritual health to recognize that both contexts present considerable dangers to my soul — the former because it provokes too much anger and the latter too much complacency.

In the discipline of Christian social ethics, democratic socialism is a likely foil because in pursuing that vocation one runs into a lot of persons of that persuasion. But I must admit that in making my argument, I probably showed too much pique toward them. As I now find myself in a more conservative environment than before, my pique has certainly diminished. But my basic argument still holds.

Finally, I heartily agree with Mr. Steinfels that "we must not substitute allegiance to any of our 'isms' for the goals we want to serve." There is no *Christian* social, economic, or even political system. We must distinguish between our ultimate and penultimate commitments. Penultimately, however, I still believe that democratic capitalism offers a better mix of liberty, social equality, pluralism, creativity, opportunity, and general well-being than its competitors. And it does not do badly with poverty, either, since the vast majority of impoverished people who have come to these shores through the centuries have long ago moved into the ranks of the middle classes or above. There certainly are enough poor, however, to warrant serious efforts at reform. But that should not be pursued by rejecting a system that has done so well on the whole.

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The author replies

Professor Benne prefers "serious efforts at reform" rather than "rejecting a system that has done so well." I am not in disagreement, partly because I think that any idea of blanket "rejecting a system" is sheer illusion. But I wrote my articles in hopes of exploring what was really systematic about this "system," that is, to what extent were democracy and capitalism supportive of one another or in tension. I think that kind of understanding is needed even to guide efforts at serious reform.

I regret that my other correspondents found my articles venomous or unfair or dependent on name-calling. I thought I had gone to some length — too much length, in fact — to spell out some specific arguments about Michael Novak's *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism:*

1. Novak has undergone a radical shift in his values and his view of America; and while he has every right to change his mind, both his old and his new positions seem to rely so heavily on subjective judgments, imprecise formulations, and selective evidence that there is considerable question why readers should follow his personal odyssey.

2. Novak's notion of "democratic capitalism" begs the question it needs to address: the logical and historical ties between capitalism and democracy. I agreed that there were historical and logical links between capitalism and the *liberal* preconditions for democracy in Western nations (limited, constitutional government); but I argued that since roughly the middle of the nineteenth century, capitalist forces and democratic ones have gone in different, and often directly conflicting, directions.

3. Novak's "trinitarian" description of democratic capitalism as involving "structurally separated" but mutually sustaining political, economic, and moral-cultural systems does not do justice to the facts of American society and is so utterly flexible as to provide no guidelines for deciding whether current policy choices actually move us closer to or further from democratic capitalism.

4. Novak's celebration of capitalism's lack of ultimate value — the "empty shrine" at its core — does not address any of the difficulties that have occupied theorists of pluralism for decades.

5. Novak tends to equate pluralism with democracy, ignoring concerns about democracy *within* his three "systems," and dismissing, for example, the possibility that economic life could be organized more democratically. It was in the context of his uncritical allegiance to a schema of three social orders supposedly in marvelous equilibrium — and his neglect of alternative pluralist models — that I called him "an eighteenth-century British Tory."

6. Far from pioneering a new area, as he claims in his letter, Novak's book stands in a long line of American efforts to promote an ideology that would use Jeffersonian rhetoric to legitimize the authority and power of corporate leadership — and would further do so, incidentally, by branding all its critics as "socialist."

Novak and his defenders have not challenged these arguments. Instead,

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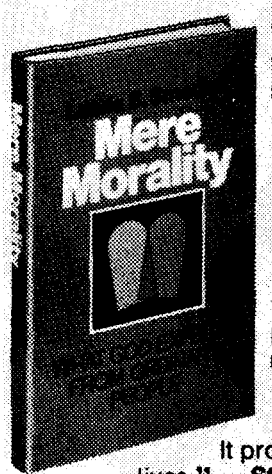

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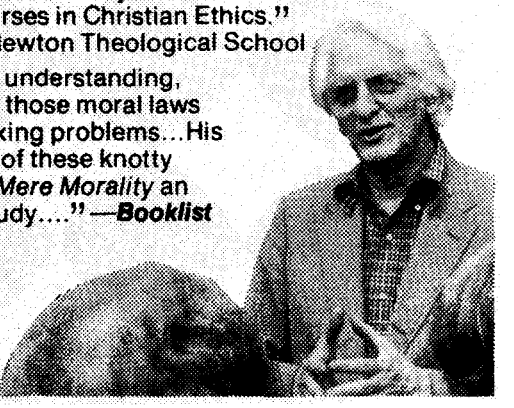

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they chose to change the subject. Bernard Murchland claims that whatever the weaknesses of *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* as history, the book is still great philosophy and theology. Murchland is wrong about the book's merit as political philosophy (points four and five above). But if he wants to believe that an unhistorical, philosophically thin work allegedly about real-world questions of politics and economy can nevertheless be theologically superb, well okay.

Michael Novak and Mary M. Ash devote the bulk of their letters to attacking democratic socialism. In a society where the very word "socialism," even when preceded by "democratic," conjures up images of Soviet Communism and totalitarian dictatorship, their rhetorical tack may be an effective one. But in fact only a small part of my critique of Novak dealt with democratic socialism, and then it was mostly to recommend that democratic socialists take a number of his criticisms seriously.

On some other occasion, I might like to take the space to show why the kind of hostility toward regulation, labor unions, and transfer payments that Ms. Ash displays is unjustified; why she is wrong in moving from the quite real problems such valuable institutions pose to blaming them for things that have much wider causes; and why a mixture of market and political control of the economy is not only quite unlike the absurdity of being "somewhat pregnant" but, in reality, is inevitable.

On that occasion, I might argue that the democratic socialist tradition offers us more keys to escaping our current economic, political, and cultural impasses than does Michael Novak's, or even Robert Benne's, version of democratic capitalism.

On that occasion, I might even express my opinion of the passage Novak quotes from Michael Harrington: Yes, I do find it a little utopian for my taste, but I am reassured by the way in which Harrington, unlike Novak, clearly identifies his utopianism as such, and by the next paragraphs (which Novak does *not* quote) in which Harrington, citing Dostoevsky, warns against the dangers of messianic totalitarianism that such a utopian vision could possibly provoke.

Obviously, in making a case for democratic socialism, I would have to meet a lot of objections and make a number of qualifications that I cannot do here. But even if, heaven forfend, I or anyone else could not mount a good case for democratic socialism, it does not follow that Michael Novak has mounted a good one for democratic capitalism.

Two other points: First, in referring to dozens of "blunders and misunderstandings" in Novak's book, I did not give only one example, as he claims, but five. In regard to Novak's misreading of Niebuhr, he claims I concede he was correct "on the substance of the point, Niebuhr's growing skepticism about socialism." In fact, what I "conceded" about Niebuhr's skepticism was that, at least at that time, it was based on reasons exactly the opposite of those Novak implied. But my reason for mentioning what Novak describes as a "detail" about an "exact parliamentary vote" was that this "detail" revealed not simply a mistake about Niebuhr but an abysmal ignorance about the history of totalitarianism, and the relationship of capitalism and socialism to that history. It is as though a writer claiming expertise on American politics were to misread a magazine article from the thirties so as to conclude that FDR opposed federal intervention in the economy. Future editions of *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* may patch up the "detail." I don't know what they will do about the underlying distortion of history.

Finally, I would like to express my ambivalent reaction to Michael Novak's somewhat plaintive account of his change in outlook. On the one hand, I think he is owed credit for raising and pursuing some questions that too many religious activists would rather ignore. I also feel the force of what he describes as a "conversion" from "a too-narrow-faith" of the left; indeed, in my articles I wrote that as "conversion stories," both his and Professor Benne's book especially deserved to be taken to heart.

On the other hand, I remain unpersuaded that he is merely reacting to his former biases, not overreacting. Too much in his account consists of large and vague generalizations as well as a kind of posturing that leaves me wary. Novak insists more than ever, for example, on his former adherence not simply to anti-capitalism or "radicalism" but to "democratic socialism." Yet I still cannot find in his extensive writings any places where, before his conversion, he clearly declared himself a democratic socialist. If readers, including Mr. Novak, can supply me with the references, I would welcome their help. But until I have been made aware of a substantial number of instances, I will have to take Michael Novak's profession of his previous fervent attachment to democratic socialism as I must take so many of his statements — with a large grain of salt.

PETER STEINFELS

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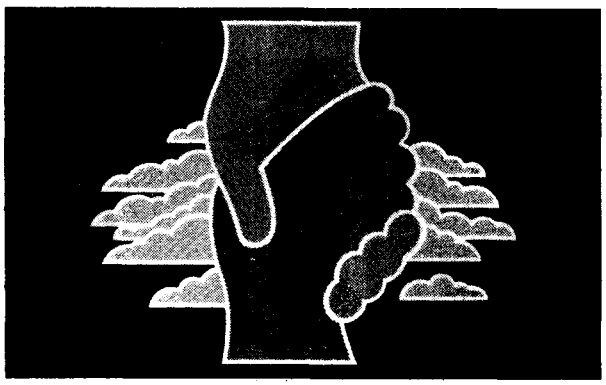

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